

Antifascism

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Antifascism:

The Course of a Crusade

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Paul Gottfried <AU from Mary Kate: Acknowledgments aren't typically signed, since it will be clear to readers that you wrote them. OK to remove?>



Antifascism

## Introduction

The following study of antifascism as a pervasive ideological force may be read as a sequel to my book Fascism: Career of a Concept (2016).<sup>1</sup> The present work also revisits themes from my monograph on the post-Marxist Left, which originally appeared in 2005.<sup>2</sup> In both these studies considerable attention is given to the rising alarm throughout the Western world about the resurgence of fascism, together with the changing definitions assigned to that term. This study will explore in greater depth the shifting meaning of fascism and try to put this in historical perspective. A preoccupation with fascism has resulted, not least of all, from its emotive value for those who are already in positions of political, journalistic, and educational power. However else it may operate, arousing a fear of fascism serves the interests of the powerful. It also involves associating fascism almost exclusively for rhetorical purposes with Hitler and the destruction of European Jewry.<sup>3</sup>

Among our elites there is a growing unwillingness to treat fascism as a movement that belonged specifically to a time and place. The term fascism functions as a resource that the speaker, whether a journalist, actor, comedian, educator, politician, or clergyman, can lay hold of in order to demonize an opponent. In the interwar period antifascist critics were usually coherent and criticized a movement that had taken power in a Western country. But critical discussions of fascism, particularly since the Second World War, have become both diffuse and imprecatory. Today the F-word is wielded mostly to bully and isolate political opponents and/or impose on the unwilling an unrequested therapeutic reconstruction.

Most alarmingly for many observers, antifascist activism has led to violence, a trend that escalated in the US with the election of Donald Trump, but which has been going on for decades.

From 1968 onward the Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany went on a rampage against supposed Nazis in the German government and business community. Before it came to an effective end in 1978, this German antifascist underground managed to murder thirty people while unleashing other forms of physical destruction. At the same time antifascist terrorism was launched by Red Brigades in Italy, which resulted in among other casualties the death of Premier Aldo Moro in 1978. In England since 1985 acts of terror against an alleged fascist threat have come from, among others, Anti-Fascist Action (AFA). More recently, since the election of Donald Trump in 2016, Antifa activists have swung into action in large cities across the country. Here too, however, such turbulent activism on the Left is nothing new. In the 1960s anti-war protests often turned violent, and in the late 1980s, Anti-Racist Action (ARA) was organized by leftist punk fans to fight the Right. According to Peter Beinert, this last group took the name that it did because Americans were more familiar with fighting racism than they were with combatting fascism.<sup>4</sup> This conflation of fascism and racism (along with other “isms”) is something I address in this book.

Observing the eruptions of violence from bands of militants that claim to be protecting society against a violent Right that is often nowhere to be seen, I was motivated to examine the political culture fueling this trend. The crusade of violent antifascism is often no more than the final stage of a process of indoctrination that political, educational, and cultural elites have engaged in since the middle of the twentieth century. What this crusade represents is an intensification or exaggeration of an official teaching, the spill-over effect of a militancy that already permeates vital political and social institutions.

The antifascist crusade is promoted through the deliberately indiscriminate use of the term “fascism,” a tendency that George Orwell warned against in his Tribune article of 1944.

Although Orwell couldn't possibly be identified as a fascist, and in fact fought in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Republican Left, he balked at the misuse of the word: "By 'Fascism' they mean, roughly speaking, something cruel, unscrupulous, arrogant, obscurantist, anti-liberal and anti-working-class. Except for the relatively small number of Fascist sympathizers, almost any English person would accept 'bully' as a synonym for 'Fascist.' But Fascism is also a political and economic system. Why, then, cannot we have a clear and generally accepted definition of it?" Orwell concluded that "it is "because it is impossible to define Fascism satisfactorily without making admissions which neither the Fascists themselves, nor the Conservatives, nor Socialists of any colour, are willing to make. All one can do for the moment is to use the word with a certain amount of circumspection and not, as is usually done, degrade it to the level of a swearword."<sup>5</sup>

It is certainly understandable that during a struggle against Nazi Germany, which was then allied to fascist Italy and a military dictatorship in Japan, fascism in England would have a blurred definition. More puzzling is the abuse of the word in the twenty-first century. Mark Bray, a chief theorist of Antifa, has repeatedly decried a ubiquitous fascist danger.<sup>6</sup> Bray sees fascists in various guises, as sexists, racists, and corporate capitalists. He helped mobilize the Occupy Wall Street protest in September 2011, and he promotes the activities of Antifa because he is supposedly resisting forces similar to those that took over Germany in the 1930s. Non-violence didn't work back then, he explained on Meet the Press on August 26, 2017, and so it is necessary, as explained in his Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook, to carry the struggle to a different level.<sup>7</sup> Bray insists that Antifa's violence is "ethical."<sup>8</sup> He and his comrades are proudly "illiberal." And "[t]hey don't see fascism or white supremacy as a view with which they disagree or as a difference of opinion."

Illustrating the antifascist mood of our time was a broadside by Jacob Siegel of the Tablet targeting my scholarship. Siegel scolded me for suggesting that fascism is peculiar to interwar Europe and that generic fascism was less destructive in its effects than Nazism. Both these suppositions were once widely accepted and may still be by some members of the academic fraternity. One encounters my interpretation in the work of Stanley Payne, who was long the dean of fascism studies in the US. Like other distinguished historians, Payne defines what he considers “generic fascism” in interwar Europe and distinguishes it from Nazism, without denying there were overlaps between the two movements.<sup>9</sup> The Nazis borrowed from a fascist reservoir of ideas but were highly selective about what they took. Extreme racism targeting Jews and Slavs, and the force of Hitler’s personality entered into what Ernst Nolte, another historian of political movements, styled “radical fascism.”<sup>10</sup> Unlike Nolte, I stress the nihilistic, violent character of Hitler’s “national revolution,” which distinguishes it from the run-of-the-mill revolutionary Right. It is for me difficult to see how the Nazi orgy of killing was simply a variation on Latin fascism or similar in character to something as anodyne as Austrian clerical fascism.

My interpretation of the growing irrelevance of Marxist-Leninism to our current politics closely parallels my stated views about the irrelevance of fascism as a political danger. Certain movements and worldviews seem to be forces of the past that contemporary politicians and ideologues evoke to rally their bases. This strategy works in the case of fascism, although not so for much Communism, because people rightly or wrongly believe fascists are a genuine threat to their survival. Those who have read my books know that I stress differences between our late modern age and what our journalists and educators decry as the bad old times.<sup>11</sup> But this anachronistic use of terms ripped out of other ages and contexts to describe present grievances is

often conveniently ignored. Inherited political labeling is stretched to cover the present moment, and so the failure of certain political actors to take the prescribed step toward building the desired future causes the term “fascist” to punctuate our discourse.

In September 2018 the Brookings Institution hosted a conversation with former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and former Brookings president Strobe Talbott on the “threat of fascism and how we can avoid the tragic errors of the past.”<sup>12</sup> To her credit, Albright, who had just published a book, Fascism: A Warning,<sup>13</sup> managed to avoid calling Trump a fascist, but did refer to him as the “most un-democratic leader the United States has ever seen.” Albright however let it be known that “fascism is a more virulent threat to peace and justice than at any time since the end of World War II.” Here one might wonder whether countries that vote democratically for populist leaders are actively promoting fascism or merely causing offense to Albright and Brookings by making the wrong electoral choice.

My assumptions about fascism do not necessitate the belief that humanity is getting better because some old villains are becoming politically insignificant. There is no evidence that human nature has changed much in the last fifty to one hundred years. Governments still act rapaciously in much of the world and individual and group violence remains a social problem. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, a spate of mass killings has occurred in the US. No one would question that the murderers who targeted innocent victims were evil, demented, or both. But should we call them “fascists” because killers have expressed prejudice against certain groups? Most of those evils that have raged in this world have not come from fascism. Racial and ethnic prejudices have existed quite independently of that movement; and not even all fascists were historically anti-Semites or admirers of Hitler.

What is being challenged here is the widespread tendency, particularly among academic, media, and political elites, to dismiss dissenters as “fascists.” This tactic turns off unwanted conversation, as when A calls B, with whom A disagrees, a racist, sexist, or homophobe. A is not just reproaching or censoring B. The name-caller is taking over the mantle of victimhood from victims in the past, which allows him or her, according to onetime German Marxist theorist Peter Furth, “to assert power over us.”<sup>14</sup> The Antifa theorist Mark Bray also lays claim to a moral high ground when he insists that he is engaging in an unfinished struggle for the downtrodden everywhere. Bray insists that he is renewing a grand struggle once waged by Anarchists and Marxist-Leninists against fascist bigotry. Pace Bray, Anarchists and Communists in the 1930s were not combating sexism and homophobia; and unlike Citibank and the Republican Party, the Nazis murdered their opponents.

This fixation in the US is hardly limited to Antifa gangs running around with the slogan “Punch a Nazi.” A distinguished Yale professor of history, Timothy Snyder published in the New York Times right after the clash between right- and left-wing groups at Charlottesville in March 2017 an attack on President Trump. The accused President was not only faulted for failing to take sides with the Left unequivocally. Snyder viewed Trump’s reluctance to give a blank check to the Left as incontrovertible evidence that fascism, meaning Nazism, is now flourishing in the US. “We might choose to forget these slogans and these events from the years before World War II, but American Nazis remember the history in their own way, and so does President Trump. The Confederate statues he admires are mostly artifacts of the early years of the 20th century, when Hitler admired the United States for its Jim Crow laws....” Further, “the presidential slogan ‘America First’ is a summons to an alternative America, one that might have

been real, one that did not fight the Nazis, one that stayed home when the world was aflame, one that failed its test.”<sup>15</sup>

Snyder’s statements indicate the contortions that antifascists engage in when attacking their opponents. The unwillingness to distinguish less destructive generic fascists from German Nazis serves ascertainable ideological ends. One weakens the power of an otherwise sweeping accusation as soon as one admits that not all fascism equals Hitler. By calling someone a “fascist,” the speaker is trying to get the audience to believe the object of this attack would have happily cheered on Nazi crimes.

Another form of the argumentum ad Hitlerum protesting the fascist tendencies in Trump’s America came from the historian Christopher R. Browning in the New York Review of Books.<sup>16</sup> “Trump has been the beneficiary of long-term trends predating his presidency showing the decline of organized labor. To consolidate his dictatorship, Hitler had to abolish the independent unions in Germany in a single blow. Trump faces no such problem. In the first three postwar decades, workers and management effectively shared the increased wealth produced by the growth in productivity.” Moreover, “since the 1970s that social contract has collapsed, union membership and influence have declined, wage growth has stagnated, and inequality in wealth has grown sharply.” Somehow the weakening of labor unions in what is becoming a post-industrial America suggests that contemporary America is moving toward the Nazi policy of Gleichschaltung, namely forcing all social institutions into the framework of a Nazi dictatorship. Trump and his party are imagined to be the “beneficiary” of this development, although we are speaking about an economic trend that has nothing to do with fascist coercion. Even more misleading is the equation of German Gewerkschaften, which were labor unions in the traditional sense, with organizations of public sector employees.



This study gives special attention to those forms of antifascism that developed in the US since the 1930s. That is because whatever radical ideas arise on the Left have often migrated from this country to the Old World. Since the end of the First World War, the US has been the most powerful and influential Western country. Besides being an economic and military leader, the US furnishes the popular culture and dominant ideas that reach the European press, and which are taught in European universities. Making this observation is not a value judgment but a recognition of the asymmetry that has resulted from our hegemonic position.

A view that I have occasionally considered but then rejected is that antifascist ideologies and movements have sprung up to some degree independently of each other, in accordance with prevalent political and cultural situations in different countries. What made me reconsider this view, as I explain in The Strange Death of Marxism, is the degree of influence exerted by things American on other societies. It is hard to believe that our present antifascist movements would have sprung up in Canada or Western Europe without an increasing American presence. This is not to say that the Red Brigades and other leftist terrorists might not have operated in Western Europe without our ideas. But these earlier and sometimes quite explosive antifascists did not prioritize intersectional politics, which defines the present antifascism.<sup>17</sup> They were anticolonial, opposed to an American military presence in Europe, and vocally anti-capitalist. The present form of antifascism reveals a sharp American imprint and a different emphasis.

It is often maintained, perhaps most conspicuously by Allan Bloom in his bestselling The Closing of the American Mind, that American academia and American culture were poisoned by a “German connection,” one that went from Nietzsche down to the Frankfurt School.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, Americans absorbed more Teutonic toxicity than was good for our democracy. Only small details of this brief are true. The Frankfurt School arose in interwar Germany and from

there migrated to the US. But this school of thought flourished in the US more than it had in interwar Germany. This happened in such a way that Critical Theory became profoundly and perhaps distinctively American and developed a long-lasting relationship to American political culture. Many of its core ideas about combatting prejudice and the “authoritarian personality” became so profoundly Americanized that they informed American concepts of democracy and were used to reeducate the Germans after World War Two. Positions that emanated from this school of thought, about fascism as an expression of psychic abnormality, resonated so well on the American side of the Atlantic that they were immediately applied to uncovering fascist tendencies through tests administered to government workers and school students. What started out as an offbeat experiment in radical social thinking in interwar Germany became mainstreamed in the US to the point that it might be inaccurate to treat it as a German import. To do so may be as misleading as treating Western Christianity as simply a new form taken by a Middle Eastern cult. By the time that Allan Bloom in the 1980s was declaiming against the Frankfurt School as a dangerous import, what he was describing was a very American ideology.

This work devotes considerable space to Germany, because of the pioneering role of the Germans since the Second World War as an antifascist state and society. Just as interwar Italy became the case study for generic fascism being raised to a form of government, so too does Germany today exemplify the elevation of antifascism to a state philosophy and program of mass reeducation. After the Second World War, the conquered Germans had no option but to submit to their forced indoctrination. But at least since the 1970s they have gone well beyond what their onetime conquerors imposed on them and what Germans might have initially perceived as humiliation. We may wonder whether other nations or peoples would have submitted so readily to continuing national self-abasement. In any case many Germans now revel in their anti-German

identity, and it would seem from their media, universities and party preferences that they have decisively rejected the distinctive national identity that they possessed even before the Nazis came to power.

On January 23, 2020 German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier delivered a penitential speech at a Holocaust conference at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Steinmeier stressed his people's continuing "full responsibility" for Nazi murders and lamented that "the worst crime against humanity was committed by my country."<sup>19</sup> According to Steinmeier, "today's Jew hatred in Europe is the same as during the Nazi era," and one particularly dangerous hotspot of this epidemic for the speaker is Germany. Steinmeier spoke in English since he considers the German language to be implicated in Nazi hatefulness. An ongoing national self-rejection that highlights an evil past and which must be born collectively, has become a permanent characteristic of German life and politics.

Some readers may question my reasons for highlighting antifascism as an ideology. For example, why should one treat antifascism as being more basic than intersectional politics for understanding today's political and educational establishment? Why is antifascism a more useful description than other terms that those who pursue a more perfect equality or more perfect globalism might adopt for their stance? The answer I would give is that fascism, however vaguely defined, remains the great evil against which those who consider themselves enlightened are now aligned. It is impossible to understand today's Left unless we also grasp what it claims to be resisting. A perpetual adversary shapes its mission; and whatever its objections to capitalism, its main enemy is not the corporation or the bank but "fascism." Also, too much space has been devoted to defining the present Left as Marxism revisited, and not enough attention has been given to the non-Marxist character of the continuing war against "hate."

Although what is characterized here as the post-Marxist Left continues to invoke Marxist shibboleths, many of its partisans and most of its financial backers still embrace a corporate capitalist economy. Until quite recently the wealthy supporters of the antifascist Left showed remarkably little concern about the socialist rhetoric of their favorite public figures. When Democratic Congresswoman, Alexandria Ocasio Cortez spoke at a Bernie Sanders presidential campaign rally on December 24, 2019, she announced that “it’s fascism” that defines the present nature of American society.<sup>20</sup> Although Ocasio Cortez recycles both Marxist tags and economic collectivist policies, the main enemy for her, or so it would seem from her statement, is fascism. This is the term that encapsulates what the present Left and much of the established conservative movement claim to be combating.

When a campaign organizer for presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in Iowa, Kyle Jurek, described what he and his comrades would do after their candidate won, he called for “reeducating people not to be f—cking Nazis.” Jurek went on to explain: “Like in Nazi Germany after the fall of the Nazi party there was a sh-t ton of the populace that was f-cking Nazified. Germany has to spend billions of dollars reeducating their f-cking people not to be Nazis.”<sup>21</sup> Jurek also talked up the advantages of the Soviet gulags for “re-education” if other less violent methods fail to achieve their purpose.<sup>22</sup> Senator Sanders’s campaign worker managed to bring together some of the themes that this book covers, e.g. the call for extending post-World War II German reeducation to conservative Americans, the view of the Soviet gulag as a center for value-training, and the glorification of violence as an indispensable means for combatting social reactionaries. This book will highlight the political culture that has rendered such attitudes morally acceptable. It is this antifascist political culture, not a history of specific antifascist movements, that will be the focus of this study.

Chapter One will examine the development of Antifa in the United States as both a major political force and a continuing source of civil disturbance. This chapter will look beyond the often simplistic explanation for this development provided by sympathetic media, namely, that in violent protests and rioting we are observing a natural, understandable response to the discovery of systemic racism in the US. One can condemn the indefensible killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and also note that Floyd was used as a pretext for gathering revolutionary forces to swing into action. The result of what in some cases was planned action was to leave inner cities devastated, to abet the shooting of policemen like the black retired St. Louis police captain David Dorn killed while trying guard a neighborhood store, and to precipitate hundreds of murders in cities from which the police had withdrawn. Although some of this violence may have been spontaneous, Antifa and those acting in concert with it had their fingerprints on the devastation. Moreover, their demonstrations prompted similar protests, resulting in looting and the toppling of statues by Antifascists in Western Europe.<sup>23</sup>

It would not be an overly suspicious reaction to assume extensive cooperation among Antifascists across borders as well as across regions of the US. We are speaking here about activist groups that in most cases have been around for some time. Explanations that focus on indignant individuals who just happen to appear in certain places at the same time are too silly to be taken seriously. Most antifascist protests seem too well orchestrated to be spontaneous events. Even more remarkable for this author are other factors related to the spreading riots, e.g., the general sympathy for the rioters expressed in polling and the absence of pushback from the other side. Why are there so few counter-protests; and why don't violent actions from the Left generate a proportionate response from the Right? One explanation offered here is that the antifascist Left has bested its opponents and critics on a scale that even its partisans may not fully appreciate.

But there is another reason for not giving recognition to the glaring imbalance of forces. It is sometimes strategically useful to exaggerate the resources of one's rivals to justify continued militancy.

Chapter Two will move back in time to examine three types of critical responses to the emergence of fascism in interwar Europe. One was the response from Italian antifascists and from German and Austrian Marxists. According to the criticism that arose on the Marxist Left, fascism embraced the concepts of a corporate state and organic nationalism as a counterrevolutionary strategy. Fascists allegedly worked at the behest of anxious capitalists to defuse a growing economic crisis by diverting attention from real social ills with bogus cures and calls for national solidarity. Another noteworthy response to the creation of a fascist state in Italy came from the classical liberal economist Ludwig von Mises, who stressed the transition from an elaborate administrative state to a fascist regime. According to Mises, the unchecked growth of the modern state paved the way for the authoritarian nationalism that gave birth to fascism.

Although this leap into fascism did not necessarily take place in all administrative regimes, one should not be surprised, according to Mises, when such regimes ended in the destruction of liberty. Government administrators allied themselves with nationalist forces from time to time, to advance their interests. Another critical perspective on fascism came from liberal parliamentarians, particularly those who had lost out to the fascists. These antifascists focused on the failures of pre-fascist governments to defend established constitutional arrangements. In the 1920s and 1930s liberal critics, looking back at the fascist takeover of the Italian state in 1922, were given to enumerating the personal and collective mistakes that culminated in an unwelcome regime. Finger-pointing at individual culprits together with observations about the structural

flaws of earlier Italian governments belonged to this examination of the collapse of Italy's parliamentary monarchy.

Despite the different angles from which these critics launched their briefs, they nonetheless agreed on certain premises. None of them assumed that the fascists who took power and those who supported them were psychologically repressed or driven by prejudice. All of them took for granted that their adversaries were rational actors who were pursuing personal and group advantage. They also examined social and political structures and (at least in the third case personal failures) to explain why their side lost. Naturally, they thought their enemies were hurting the working class and/or creating an oppressive form of public administration coupled with an aggressive foreign policy. But these early antifascists did not ascribe the unpleasant aspects of fascist rule to mental illness. They understood that it was possible for others to follow fascist leaders without betraying signs of mental disease. Fascist followers were being gulled or else benefited from the fascist government, but in neither case were the antifascists seen as speaking about a mental pathology that antifascist authorities were required to address once they took power.

A possible interpretive objection to my line of thought is that I am providing a cookie-cutter definition of fascism. It may seem that I am going too far as a terminological purist in denying later movements that may draw from fascist traditions an association with interwar fascism. Admittedly I am engaging in a restrictive usage, but this is what historians of fascism have done in differentiating their subject from other movements that were essentially different but in some way overlapped, such as non-fascist right-wing authoritarianism or non-fascist nationalism. Such distinctions are essential for separating distinctive political movements and ideologies, for example, Nazi and Soviet totalitarian governments or East German Communist

socialism and Swedish welfare state socialism. But even more important may be the need to keep the word “fascist” from falling into utter meaninglessness. This historically specific term is now being used as a weapon against anyone with whom a speaker may disagree politically. In the face of rhetorical hyperinflation, it pays to be particularly careful in how one applies the F-word.

In Chapter Three emphasis will be placed on the redefinition of fascism as a therapeutic problem. Although the activities of such leading representatives of the Frankfurt School as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm, and Karen Horney would provide support for the struggle against the fascist mindset, what they promoted had already been prefigured by American Progressives. During the First World War and then in the early stages of the New Deal, American government advisers and social reformers hoped to apply “scientific” administration to fighting authoritarianism from the Right. The Frankfurt School and its war against fascism could thrive in the US because the groundwork had already been laid there.

The Critical Theory that emanated from Frankfurt School emigres and their American adherents had a relatively restricted focus. The main target in their denunciation of “pseudo-democrats” and the “authoritarian personality” was anti-Semitism. This focus was entirely understandable, given the Jewish origins of these refugee theorists. Although they did pass critical judgment on prejudice against homosexuals and women, their fight against fascism and their prescriptions for government policies centered on anti-Jewish prejudice. This was the main theme of the Studies in Prejudice, a project that Adorno and Horkheimer carried out for their sponsors in the American Jewish Committee in the 1940s. Anti-Semitism is clearly the pivotal point in the most widely circulated volume in this series, The Authoritarian Personality, which was published in 1950.



Another fact that one must keep in mind is that the Frankfurt School was unalterably socialist. Some of its members, especially Herbert Marcuse,<sup>24</sup> viewed themselves as hardcore Marxist-Leninists as well as partisans of erotic self-expression. Unlike the antifascists of the present era, however, the first generation of Critical Theorists were concerned less with constructing lists of victims and calling for accommodating them than they were with creating their own kind of socialist economy. Also, unlike today's Left, these architects of the therapeutic Left were not allied to billionaires and large investment companies while professing to be against the system.

A key text for understanding the fusion of revolutionary socialism with Frankfurt School themes is The Destruction of Reason (1954), a work by the Hungarian Communist man of letters Georg Lukacs (1885–1971). Lukacs viewed socialism as the “rational” path toward which Western history had been moving since the early nineteenth century. According to this view, socialism inhered in the “dialectical thinking” that originated with the philosopher Hegel (1770–1831). Although a defender of the Prussian state, Hegel had explained modern history as a revolutionary process that was accessible to and in some sense determined by human reasoning. Fascism, according to Lukacs, was the response of those who wished to hold back revolutionary change. It was therefore inevitable that fascists would be locked in mortal combat with Communism, as the final stage of an historical dialectic. Those who wished to nip fascism in the bud were urged to commit themselves to building a revolutionary socialist society, a goal that the Soviets were supposedly already carrying out. Lukacs produced The Destruction of Reason as an unmistakable defender of orthodox Communist positions.<sup>25</sup> Unlike some of his latter-day admirers, he was not battling sexism and homophobia. But his view of modern history as a

choice between leftist revolution and fascism continues to shape the mindset of antifascist militants.

The concluding section of Chapter Three, on penitential historiography, may be viewed as a worthwhile digression. It deals with the use of written history as a tool for making the reader aware of the sins of the politically incorrect past and thereby leading him or her toward both expiation and zeal for social reform. Although antifascism is not the only aspect of this plainly ideologically driven historical writing, it does feature prominently in the penitential historiography of German, Italian, and Spanish “revisionist” scholars. Particular attention is paid to the arguments advanced by Fritz Fischer and his acolytes regarding Germany’s “sole responsibility” for the outbreak of World War I. Fischerites emphasize the supposed continuities in the German leadership classes and in German political attitudes from the Second Empire through Hitler’s accession to power. This stress on what has become the ever deepening burden of German historical guilt, which aroused my interest as a graduate student in the mid-1960s, leads to this aside in Chapter Three. I examine historiographical appeals to guilt in relation to the present crusade against a presumed fascist threat. I am not suggesting that penitential historiography lacks any scholarly merit. What I mean to point out is that determining its worth has been rendered difficult because historical studies are treated as sacred political texts. Anyone who questions these received accounts becomes politically suspect and finally, immoral.

In Chapter Four, an overview is offered of the major changes undergone by antifascist ideology since the 1960s. Among the changes herein examined are the growing list of prejudices and forbidden words that government and other public institutions are combating, the reduction of historic fascism to Hitler and his exterminationist policies, and the association of fascism with emotions and attitudes that displease influential journalists, academics, and civic leaders. At this

point concepts become increasingly detached from long received understandings. They depend for their meaning on what authority figures tell us. This recalls Thomas Hobbes's assertion in Leviathan, that words acquire fixed meaning through a sovereign. The Hobbesian leader becomes the source of linguistic clarity as well as someone who exercises political authority. In the antifascist order of things, settled meanings are no longer available. Words and ideas are banned or redefined to accommodate moral censors, so that the "fixity" of meaning that Hobbes thought was a precondition for civic peace no longer exists.

Chapter Four will explore closely the emerging culture of antifascism, which projects a uniform quality throughout the Western world. Fascism is the central evil against which all liberal democratic societies must perpetually mobilize themselves. In 2018, the centrist German government under Chancellor Angela Merkel spent 116 million Euros in a *Kampf gegen rechts* (Struggle against the Right) that targeted the producers of right-wing ideas.<sup>26</sup> Although the Right—except for one isolated party that is made up largely of disaffected members of Merkel's transformed CDU—have virtually no electoral presence in Germany, a crusade against what seem to be hidden forms of fascism is of fundamental importance for the German regime. Failure to be sufficiently on guard against this evil, which allegedly invades minds as well as governments, could result in succumbing once again to Nazi tyranny. While racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, sexism, and homophobia are all anathema in the Western media, they are also thought to be expressions of fascism. What falls under this category is also inevitably paired with Nazism and the threat of Nazi genocide. Accordingly the European Parliament has demanded that every member state ban neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups as sources of xenophobia.<sup>27</sup> No comparable demand has issued from the same body to deal with the very real threat of Islamicist violence.

Chapter Five features a discussion of the European populist Right seeking to take power in France, Germany, England, Sweden, and the Lowlands. Although this discussion does not consider the long-run political prospects for populist success, it does put into relief the present anxiety of some Europeans that “fascist” populists may soon be ruling them. These predictions may be grossly exaggerated, as are statements that liken populists to interwar fascists or German Nazis. But neither the political establishment nor its antifascist allies in the media and academy may intend to deceive us when they express concern. At least some of these voices may be coming from those who are genuinely alarmed by what they consider a threat to their power.

Chapter Six will concentrate on the antifascism of the American conservative establishment, which resembles its leftist variants. The conservative media parrot the Left’s warnings about a fascist danger, while trying to adapt that message to their own cause. Like the Left, conservative celebrities find a fascist threat in, among other things, a resurgent European nationalist Right, and more generally, white racism and anti-Semitism. In view of so-called conservative sponsors, which include defense industries, immigration-friendly corporate capitalists, and pro-Israeli, socially liberal donors like Sheldon Adelson and Paul Singer, it is not surprising that conservative media have never felt driven to break from certain antifascist stereotypes.

Instead the conservative media pin the fascist label on their opponents with the same abandon as their rivals. This practice reaches the point of parody in Jonah Goldberg’s bestseller Liberal Fascism, a work that highlights the supposed fascist and Nazi template of Democratic Party politics. Moreover, Goldberg’s ally Dinesh D’Souza has undertaken to demonstrate the racist and proto-fascist lineage of the opposing national party. Supposedly the Democratic Party is hiding its fascist past, with the help of the friendly media. Conservative celebrities also bring

up the fascism supposedly hidden in the radical Left when they denounce uncongenial authors and political actors. We are led to believe that democracy is endangered because of the influence of French deconstructionists and such undemocratic German thinkers as Nietzsche and Heidegger. Republican celebrity Glenn Beck famously featured on his TV program a picture of German existentialist Heidegger, who briefly served the Nazis, juxtaposed to a photograph of Hillary Clinton. The association could not have been clearer. All that was lacking was the image of a Nazi Swastika above Hillary's head.

Chapter Seven presents an extended contrast between the fascist and antifascist models of the state and looks at the assumptions about human nature that each has highlighted. While fascists exalted masculinity and a warrior ethic, antifascists fight against what they condemn as "toxic masculinity." Antifascists have called for and, where the opportunity exists, implemented measures to remove a specific masculine identity from the workplace, social organizations, and even family relations. Another feature of fascism and of all traditional conservative movements that antifascists combat is the notion of a fixed human identity based in false social ascriptions. Finally, in contrast to the fascist stress on integral nationalism, the antifascists advocate a borderless world. (There is an apparent lack of interest in non-Western countries, even those that rigorously control immigration.)

An Excursus follows Chapter Seven in which reference is made to the theory of knowledge presented by Thomas Hobbes in his magnum opus Leviathan. Hobbes was uncertain whether people who conversed with each other shared the same perception of reality. From his perspective, facts that depend on sensory knowledge are subject to the accidental movement of our brain particles and cannot be entirely relied on as a truth source. Because of this problem it seemed to Hobbes that sovereign authority was needed, and not only to prevent the "war of all

against all.” Such authority would also have to intervene to explain what things signified.

Otherwise we would face endless bickering over the meaning of words, which in some cases could lead to civil strife. In the contemporary world, it is argued in the Excursus, the media and to a lesser extent the academy provide the “sovereign authority” that serves to “signify” what things mean. This applies particularly to political labeling, in which terms have come to mean what journalists, politicians, and academics say they mean.

The Afterthoughts section of this book will explain why antifascism is likely to remain a critical element in our political culture. Large corporations have moved toward the cultural Left and promote the initiatives of antifascist activists. Capitalist interests now dovetail with antifascist ones, e.g., expanding immigration from the Third World and bringing down national borders, policies that create larger consumer markets and reduce the cost of labor. One should not exaggerate the danger to global capitalism posed by Antifa demonstrators, not even the ones who organized the Occupy Wall Street protest. These apparent enemies share common views on the social and cultural front.

Antifascism is integral to a post-Marxist Left that today enjoys cultural support in much of the West and, not incidentally, in the US. This now surging Left rests on an alliance of government, a corporate capitalist economy, and what for want of a better term has been styled “cultural Marxism.” In accordance with Frankfurt School thinking, the devil we are urged to combat is fascism, and the struggle will go on between the properly sensitized and the fascist evil until the latter is destroyed. The antifascist demonology draws on the Christian view of Satan, while the war to be waged against fascism calls to mind the struggle of Christ and his disciples. Furthermore, the antifascist crusade recycles older mythic archetypes. It embodies the polarity

that is present in all dualistic religion,<sup>28</sup> and this may be one of its psychic strengths. Antifascism is the most recent form of a mythical prototype that has proved remarkably durable.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gottfried, Fascism: Career of a Concept (De Kalb, Ill.: NIU Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Gottfried, The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium (Columbia, Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Fascism: Career of a Concept, 59-82; <https://humanevents.com/2020/06/11/the-abuse-of-fascism/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://peterbeinart.net/trump-gets-wrong-antifa/>.

<sup>5</sup> George Orwell, Tribune, “As I Please,” March 24, 1944; Paul Gottfried, “The Uses and Misuses of Fascism,” Society 54 (Spring 2017) 315-19; and Michael Ledeen, “Nobody Knows Anything about Fascism,” Forbes (May 19, 2016) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelledeen/2016/05/19/nobody-knows-anything-about-fascism/#42f322af658e>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/meet-press-august-20-2017-n794321>.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Bray, Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook (Melville House, 2017); and <https://www.mhpbooks.com/books/antifa/>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.vox.com/2017/8/25/16189064/antifa-charlottesville-dc-unite-the-right-mark-bray>; also Paul Gottfried, “The Myth Making of Antifa Intellectuals” in The American Conservative, October 18, 2018, <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-myth-making-of-antifa-intellectuals/>.

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- <sup>9</sup> Stanley G. Payne, Fascism, Comparison and Definition, reprint (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); and A History of Fascism, 1914-1945 (Madison Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).
- <sup>10</sup> Ernst Nolte, Die Krise des liberalen Systems und die faschistischen Bewegungen (Munich: Piper, 1968), 35-69.
- <sup>11</sup> See for example Paul Gottfried, After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).
- <sup>12</sup> <http://peterbeinart.net/trump-gets-wrong-antifa/>; <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/09/11/madeleine-albright-on-fascism-democracy-and-diplomacy/>.
- <sup>13</sup> Madeleine Albright, Fascism: A Warning (New York: Harper Collins, 2018).
- <sup>14</sup> See Peter Furth, “Epigonaler Antifaschismus,” in Tumult 1 (Spring 2016), 30-32. A work that influenced Furth and myself regarding the relation between what is now called “virtue-signaling” and the quest for power is a short, posthumously published book Machtfragen (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1998), particularly 28-129, by the Greek Germanophone political theorist Panajotis Kondylis (1943-1998).
- <sup>15</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/18/opinion/the-test-of-nazism-that-trump-failed.html>. Two books by Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century (Tim Duggan Books, 2017) and The Road to Unfreedom (Tim Duggan books, 2018) reprise his now familiar theme, that Trump’s presidency and the appearance of right-of-center parties and governments in Europe portend a return to fascism.
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2018/10/25/suffocation-of-democracy/>.
- <sup>17</sup> Paul Gottfried, The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005), especially 12-31, 104-15.



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- <sup>18</sup> Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind, reissue (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012), 141-56, 217-28.
- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/at-yad-vashem-german-president-says-germans-havent-learned-lesson-of-holocaust/>.
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-america-not-advanced-society-us-fascism-wealth-inequality-1479027>.
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.breitbart.com/2020-election/2020/01/16/bernie-campaigner-kyle-jurek-arrested-days-before-project-veritas-expose/>.
- <sup>22</sup> <https://heavy.com/news/2020/01/watch-project-veritas-video-bernie-sanders-kyle-jurak/>.
- <sup>23</sup> A remarkably similar explanation for the success of the Antifascists to the one herein offered can be found in the Spanish interview of today's leading historian of fascism Stanley Payne: [https://www.ahorainformacion.es/wp-content/themes/AhoraInfo/images/logoAI\\_hor\\_sub.png](https://www.ahorainformacion.es/wp-content/themes/AhoraInfo/images/logoAI_hor_sub.png)
- <sup>24</sup> Rolf Wiggershaus in Die Frankfurter Schule (Munich: C. Hanser Verlag, 1987), 432, quotes the long letter sent to Theodor Adorno in February 1947 by Herbert Marcuse affirming the unswervingly socialist mission of the Frankfurt School. This letter was occasioned by Adorno's plan to reopen the Institute in Frankfurt. See also Fascism: Career of a Concept, 61-64.
- <sup>25</sup> See Georg Lukacs, Die Zerstörung der Vernunft (Munich: Luchterhand, 1960). An illuminating essay on Lukacs as a forerunner of modern antifascism has come from German literature scholar Till Kinzel, "Dem Denken die Bahn vorgeben," in Festschrift für Karlheinz Weissmann (Berlin: Edition JF, 2019). See also the characterization of

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Lukacs in Ernst Nolte's Der kausale Nexus: Über Revisionen und Revisionismen in der Geschichtswissenschaft (Munich: Herbig, 2002), 57.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.hessen-depesche.de/politik/schon-116-millionen-im-jahr-kosten-f%C3%BCr-%E2%80%9Ekampf-gegen-rechts%E2%80%9C-explodieren.html>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20181018IPR16527/parliament-demands-ban-on-neo-fascist-and-neo-nazi-groups-in-the-eu>.

<sup>28</sup> This is the major theme of Mircea Eliade's classic The Sacred and Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1987).

For a study of the reliance of the multicultural Left on romantic and primitive mythology, see Jérôme Blanchet-Gravel, La face cachée du multiculturalisme (Paris: Cerf, 2018).

## Chapter One: Antifa and the Mainstreaming of Antifascism

On June 1, 2020, Jeremiah Ellison, the son of Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison and a Minneapolis Councilman, used Twitter to declare his support for Antifa. This was in response to Donald Trump's tweet of the same day that the US would designate Antifa as a terrorist organization. Neither Jeremiah nor his father had previously made any secret of his sympathy for Antifa. Nor had they hidden their estimate of Trump as someone leading the US into what they understand as fascism. A smiling Keith Ellison posed for pictures with Mark Bray's Antifa: The Antifascist Handbook in the radical Minneapolis Moon Palace Bookstore.<sup>1</sup> We might note that millions of Minnesotans elected him to his present post in 2018, despite what were by then plausible charges that he had physically abused his girlfriend.<sup>2</sup>

In late May 2020 two progressive Democratic congresswomen Ayanna Presley and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez were found raising money for Antifa,<sup>3</sup> an action that was judged by leaders of their party to be somewhat imprudent. While it is one thing to sympathize with Antifa and to attack its opponents as fascists or worse, identifying with it too openly might have the effect of unsettling non-leftist voters. Politicians in most districts in the US, outside of cities like New York, San Francisco, and Minneapolis, must still be careful about sounding like those academics and out-and-out partisans, who have expressed support for Antifa. In 2017 Mark Bray, then lecturing at Dartmouth College, was criticized for advocating force in fighting what he and his comrades designated as the fascist Right and for calling for de-platforming the opposition. Thereupon one hundred members of the College faculty signed a declaration of support.<sup>4</sup>

Far more characteristic of the indirect defense of Antifa that has come from the mainstream national media is this feature on the Washington Post editorial page (June 3, 2020). The editorialist asks: “Is it time to call Trump the f-word?” and then provides this predictable response. According to the writer Ishan Tharoor, who quotes Adam Weinstein of the New Republic, Trump laid the groundwork for a fascist state, deploying “xenophobia” and “ultranationalist” rhetoric to establish what looks like a fascist order. Nowhere does Tharoor, Weinstein, or Frederico Finchelstein, a professor from the New School, whom the editorial quotes, openly back Antifa. But they do paint a dire picture of a would-be fascist president appealing to ethnic hate while leaving it to the reader to draw the necessary conclusion. Whatever has been tried to stop the fascist juggernaut has from all evidence not worked and therefore more may be needed to save us from a fascist future. A decision by President Trump and Attorney General Bill Barr to declare Antifa to be domestic terrorists in June 2020 brought forth indignant objections from the national press. *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof was particularly exercised by the “Antifa hysteria,” noting it “hasn’t killed anyone and appears to have been only a marginal presence in Black Lives Matter protests. None of those arrested on serious federal charges related to the unrest have been linked to antifa.”<sup>5</sup>

Some have viewed Antifa as a shield against a fascist or Nazi threat. The eagerness of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, his party, and much of the national media to present President Trump as a fascist or leaning in that direction, is grist for the mills of Antifa activists. The black civil rights attorney and lifetime Democrat Leo Terrell has complained bitterly that his own party is condoning terror.<sup>6</sup> Trying to re-enforce what may be seem a necessary alliance, presidential candidate Biden’s staffers bailed out Antifa activists arrested for particularly conspicuous violence.<sup>7</sup>

Antifa activists, who swung into full action after Donald Trump's election in 2016, have voiced the same concern as the Democratic opposition about America's first fascist administration. And they have not been sitting on their hands. A widely distributed film from Project Veritas<sup>8</sup> by someone who infiltrated a group of activists shows that contrary to its depiction in the New York Times as a loose collection of idealistic antifascists,<sup>9</sup> Antifa is a well-organized national movement, even if it continues to be an agglutination of semi-independent radical groups, with foreign and domestic backers and sympathizers and with generous funding. Antifa expert Mark Bray was not telling us the full truth when he stated in the Washington Post (June 1, 2020) that "Antifa groups are loosely organized and they aren't large enough to cause everything Trump blames them for."<sup>10</sup>

Nor is it the case that, pace Bray, Antifa merely responds to police violence.<sup>11</sup> University campuses and radical leftist bookstores and coffee houses are among the places where Antifa has stacked weapons, black hoods, and other accessories for their assaults. Those who have been wounded and blinded, supposedly by accident, are well-chosen targets.<sup>12</sup> Loads of bricks have suddenly appeared in areas where Antifa, in conjunction with Black Lives Matter, has staged protests.<sup>13</sup> In my borough of Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, a Black Lives Matter demonstration was planned for June 6, 2020, allegedly to protest the killing of George Floyd. Local business leaders then learned to their consternation that Antifa had piled up bricks on the Eastern edge of Elizabethtown, the evening before the protest. As soon as reports of this surfaced, merchants invited in regional antiterrorist militias to protect their establishments.<sup>14</sup> The demonstration went off peacefully.

The clash between Antifa and elements of the Radical Right in Charlottesville in March 2017 boosted the former's reputation. Out of this street fighting, which Antifa helped instigate,

the group gained public esteem. The fact that a protester was killed by a car driven by someone with neo-Nazi associations did wonders for the image of the Antifa activists. According to a prevalent narrative, the embattled antifascists had faced down neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. Although it may be hard to sympathize with either side in this confrontation,<sup>15</sup> the media and the political class generally depicted it as a showdown between neo-Nazis and valiant crusaders for human rights. Antifa has been able to take advantage of crises to create a reputation of protecting the vulnerable and victimized. It played on this image in 2017 by presenting itself, with media assistance, as the good side in Charlottesville.

After 2016, Antifa activists positioned themselves as the frontline defense against the Altright, until this became a profitless pursuit. Media interest in the Altright dwindled after Trump's election, while its representatives along with those incorrectly labeled as such, experienced de-platforming. (The establishment conservative movement in what has become the predictable response took the lead in ostracizing its own "extremists" or anyone viewed as inappropriately right-wing.)<sup>16</sup> Antifa has had the option of targeting anyone who appears on the long, wide-ranging "hate" lists of left-wing organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020 and the rioting that followed invested Antifa with new popularity. It would be a mistake to confuse Antifa with either classical Anarchism or Marxist-Leninism. Although it borrows symbols and historical heroes from both, together with Anarchist black flags and clothing, Antifa is distinct from older leftist movements. It blends with whatever leftist cause is in the ascendant and treats whoever opposes it as fascist.

The Antifa theorist Alexander Reid-Ross, who teaches geography at Portland State University, has come closer than anyone else to making sense of this movement's targeting of

certain enemies. In his book, which has been widely acclaimed among progressives, Against the Fascist Creep, Reid-Ross furnishes a picture of a fascist danger that never quite speaks its name, except for some indiscreet white nationalists who divulge their true goals. Other promoters of the fascist threat supposedly hide behind misleading labels, which renders them particularly insidious in the struggle against bigotry.<sup>17</sup> It is precisely the cleverness with which fascists and their sympathizers disguise themselves that, according to Reid-Ross, necessitates the cleansing operation of antifascist groups. T. Keith Preston, an historian of anarchism, has noted that Reid-Ross and other defenders of Antifa usually sound like “John Birchers of the Left.”<sup>18</sup> Like the Birchers who imagined that Communist agents were in disguise and had to be exposed, the antifascists have their own version of the hidden enemy, whom they are trying to combat.

Preston also observes that while Reid-Ross and his followers can offer academic definitions of what fascism taught in the 1920s and 1930s, they stray from these definitions when describing their present all-pervasive enemy. Fascist now means whom or whatever the antifascists have decided to attack. Further, these activists have no interest in debating those who deny their opinions and offer evidence of a contrary position. For example, nowhere in Against the Fascist Creep does Reid-Ross deal with the argument that fascism lost most of its influence and power after World War Two. Instead, those who do not agree with his interpretation are linked to an all-enveloping fascist conspiracy by virtue of having consorted with people on the political Right. Preston asks whether name-calling amounts to a serious refutation or is really a method of avoiding a necessary discussion. Clearly this distinction is in no way relevant for antifascist discourse.

In any case Reid-Ross has increased his appeal by being featured in both the Israeli newspaper Haaretz, as an expert on the anti-Semitism that has been unleashed in the US since

Trump's election, and the Arab news agency Al Jazeera, where he writes on anti-Islamic prejudice. (For a teacher of introductory geography with an undergraduate's knowledge of historic fascism, Reid-Ross validates the exclamatory phrase that I heard from European immigrants as a child: "Only in America!") Arun Gupta, of The Guardian and a co-organizer with Mark Bray of the Occupy-Wall-Street movement, has lavishly praised Reid-Ross's analytic skills. In a widely quoted Amazon editorial review, Gupta offers this endorsement: "This book is good for smashing cockroaches and fascism, which may appear more similar after a careful reading."<sup>19</sup>

It is no surprise that universities have provided a receptive base from which to recruit radical activists. Career revolutionary Eric Mann, speaking in 2007 at the University of California San Diego, alluded to the role of universities as breeding grounds for leftist activism. He told the students assembled there that "the university is both the place where I was radicalized. It is the place where Mao Zedong was radicalized. It is the place where Lenin and Fidel and Che were radicalized." Citing Howard Zinn's A People's History of the United States, he informed his young audience that their country "is what's called a 'white settler state... The United States has basically been conquering land under a white Christian flag under a view of white supremacy..."<sup>20</sup>

Mann is the director of the Labor/Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles, where BLM co-founder Patrisse Cullors was trained. (Mann's fellow Weather Underground member Susan Rosenberg has served on the board of directors of Thousand Currents, which provides financial support for the Black Lives Matter Global Network.<sup>21</sup>) In his lecture at UC San Diego Mann said his work involved "organizing mainly young people that want to be revolutionaries," and this includes "finding young people that want to go into the high schools as public school



teachers.” The Labor/Community Strategy Center “is trying to build an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist united front.”<sup>22</sup>

Of all movements that Antifa may resemble in its methods and in how it targets its adversaries, German Nazism while it was struggling to take power may resemble it most closely. In both cases we are dealing with movements that have traded in organized street violence, which have been defined by their enemies and which have taken advantage of a vast network of support from public administration, universities, and the producers of public opinion. Unlike generic fascists, Antifa is not patriotic, and it seeks to destroy, not reinforce historic Western notions. It is also by far too irrational and nihilistic to be Marxist. The last part of a cry chanted by activists at a mass protest in Berkeley, California on August 27, 2017 underscores the true nature of Antifa’s politics: “No Trump, No Wall, No USA at All.”<sup>23</sup> Attempts by Republican politicians and PR staff to treat Antifa as the latest distillation of Marxist socialism reflect partisan opportunism, historical ignorance, or possibly both. Except for its efforts to identify itself with other Lefts at other times, Antifa through violence and its ability to create extensive support systems looks very much like early National Socialism.

Intermittent appeals from activists calling themselves antifascist to establish decentralized government do not clash with the view that these militants have something in common with the Nazis. What is meant by decentralization is the removal of already radicalized urban areas from police control and establishment of bases from which these antifascists can operate. Antifa activists, along with Black Lives Matter and others, temporarily established an “autonomous zone” in Seattle from which the police withdrew.<sup>24</sup> The mayor only moved to dismantle the zone after reports of rape and multiple shootings that resulted in two teenagers being killed and three people wounded.<sup>25</sup>

Soeren Kern, in his book A Brief History of Antifa examines in detail the funding sources that have been available for his subject.<sup>26</sup> A major sponsor of Antifa has been The Alliance for Global Justice (AFGJ), which has stood financially behind far-left organizations. In 2010 the AFGJ was a principal backer of the Occupy Wall Street movement, and since then it has tried to create a favorable view of Marxist-Leninist governments, most notably Castro's Cuba. The AFGJ is principally a distribution center for allocating funds, which collects money from like-minded organizations. These funding sources work hard to present themselves as mainstream progressives, such as the staffs of George Soros's Open Society Foundation, Tides Foundation, and Ben & Jerry Foundation. AFCJ funding has also gone to Refuse Fascism, an organization formed after the 2016 election with the goal of removing Donald Trump from office. The slogan on the website of Refuse Fascism is: "In the Name of Humanity, We Refuse to Accept a Fascist America!" Members identify as antifascist, though they are not part of Antifa.

Any consideration of antifascist funding should factor in large corporations, like PepsiCo, Citibank, Nike, Facebook, Ford Foundation, and Goldman Sachs that contribute to Black Lives Matter and other leftwing activist groups. These corporate giants have helped bail out militants who were arrested and who would include Antifa as well as Black Lives Matter activists. Movements that demonstrate, topple statues, and engage in violence together are also likely to share the same funders.<sup>27</sup> As Influence Watch demonstrates, it has been a continuing strength of Antifa that it easily combines with other activist organizations, for example, Showing up for Racial Justice and Black Lives Matter. The Black Lives Matter Global Network into which most of the funding goes, moreover, supports revolutionary groups, including Communist ones.<sup>28</sup> None of this however proves corporations that fund the far Left have any interest in promoting socialism or Communism.

There is more than one reason for the cultural radicalization of the affluent that has included support by some for the activities of Antifa and other movements like it. Mercer Global Consultants, which monitors the hiring of minorities, has reported that major corporations have yet to address the problem that their workforces consist of 80% or more of white males.<sup>29</sup> Corporations may therefore be concerned about being subject to boycotts and adverse publicity from the Left, goaded on by sympathetic media. Introducing politically correct forms of address and promoting the cultural left with generous donations and expressions of support may therefore be regarded as a necessary precaution against suffering leftist reprisals. Corporate executives can serve the cultural Left without having to be concerned about pressure coming from the largely ineffective and even diminishing Right. White male Christians, who on average are the country's most conservative voting demographic, may be a dwindling presence in the corporate world, even if that presence is not fading as quickly as diversity officers might desire.<sup>30</sup>

A Rasmussen poll from early June 2020 indicated that Antifa had the support of 22% of the country.<sup>31</sup> A CNN poll conducted in the first week of June 2020 tells us that most Americans consider white racism to be a major problem, and many blame this affliction on Donald Trump. Moreover, 27% of those polled believe violence is an appropriate response to the present level of police brutality and racism.<sup>32</sup> This shows that antifascist groups like Antifa are operating in a somewhat friendly environment, particularly in American cities. What that means for those cities remains to be seen.

The Left Center or liberal establishment which has made an at least tacit alliance with the kind of antifascism exhibited by Antifa may be saddled with troublesome friends, just as the German nationalist Right was with a supposedly sympathetic paramilitary in the interwar years.

Self-described European antifascists complicate the picture by showing up in strange spots in the political spectrum. In Germany, the revulsion of antifascists for their own country as permanently tainted by its Nazi and even nationalist past has led them to join Zionist demonstrations waving Israeli flags. One can also imagine these anti-German Germans defecting to the Palestinian side, if they view it as more of a break from their country's past. Hatred may be the most powerful emotion driving their movement.

The point of this comparison is not to smear Antifa with the Nazi label that the American media have broadly applied to the Right, when they are not identifying it with bigoted gun-owners living in flyover country. It is a recognition of where Antifa fits most easily among the dominant ideologies of the last century. It resembles most closely the nihilistic, destructive movement that it claims to be fighting. Of course, we need not push this comparison too far and should recognize its obvious limits. Unlike the Nazis, Antifa claims to be fighting fascism.

Comparisons with Communist activists have been made. Because Antifa, consisting of autonomous groups, is not a single organization, membership numbers are not available. The membership of the interwar Communist Party USA even during the height of the Depression never rose above sixty-five thousand,<sup>33</sup> Earl Browder, the CPUSA presidential candidate obtained 83,000 votes in 1936, which was at the height of Browder's party's popularity. The percentage of support expressed for Antifa indicates that these modest numbers could be easily surpassed by votes given to a self-declared candidate of the Antifascist Left at just a few state universities.

Undoubtedly the Communists also once had a vast network of fellow-travelers, reaching into the government, but unlike this earlier Left, the present antifascist one has advocates at all levels of government and throughout the media and educational system. It is not a conspiracy,

like “Communist infiltrators,” but an open revolutionary movement whose ubiquitous sympathizers justify or underplay antifascist violence. One need only contrast the public concern shown in the 1950s that Communist sympathizers were surreptitiously infiltrating the film industry with the commanding power wielded by today’s cultural Left, including Antifa apologists in the national press. Unlike Communists and Communist fellow-travelers of an earlier generation, the present Left does not hide its efforts to control the entertainment industry. Leftist opinion-makers do not hesitate to order HBO or Netflix to remove from circulation whatever runs contrary to their ideological agenda, and obliging capitalists typically do as they are told.<sup>34</sup> Government attempts to move against Antifa may work about as well as German Chancellor Heinrich Brüning’s efforts to ban the SS and SA in April 1932. By June of that year Brüning had been replaced by a new chancellor, Franz von Papen, who removed the ban on Nazi paramilitary formations while trying to cut a deal with Hitler.<sup>35</sup>

Antifa represents the militant anti-capitalist Left but even more significantly constitutes the opposition to Western civilization. In the vanguard of these revolutionary forces, the corporate sector, as noted above, is playing a critical role.<sup>36</sup> Paypal, Pepsi, Adobe, and other corporations have been working to get Facebook and related electronic media to de-platform dissenting voices on the Right.<sup>37</sup>

A German libertarian philosopher Roland Baader self-published in 2002 what became a classic among culturally conservative defenders of capitalism, *Totgedacht*, a study of how intellectuals are destroying civilization. Baader takes up complaints that cultural conservatives and German patriots have typically leveled against the antifascist war against tolerance and traditional cultural standards. He scolds the intelligentsia for changing the meaning of words in such a way as to make it morally impermissible to argue against leftist censors. Baader further

exerts himself on behalf of the concepts of a free market and commercial competition against “globalists” and “fake capitalists.” Those opportunists whom Baader condemns embrace the antifascist cultural revolution, not as capitalists, but as allies of a leftist government and ruling class. Baader separates these actors from those noble souls who follow their true interests qua capitalists.

The question remains whether capitalist interests can be dissociated in the real world from how the capitalist system operates. How that system functions will necessarily depend on certain variables, among them, who wields political power and what cultural values are being taught by leading institutions.<sup>38</sup> Constructing ideal models of a free market economy and contrasting it to how “crony” or corrupt capitalists operate, dodges the question of whether we are looking at real as opposed to imaginary capitalists. Historical contexts are not easily separated from historical actors if we are considering how systems function. In any case it is exceedingly hard to divorce capitalism in its present corporate phase from the political problem this book analyzes.

Attempts to depict the present struggle as one between capitalists and socialist revolutionaries have been greatly exaggerated, given the overwhelming presence of corporate capitalists among the revolutionaries. What may be closer to the truth and has been noted by observers is the burgeoning alliance of the political and economic establishment with Black Lives Matter and Antifa. German political sociologist Claus Wolfschlag has observed that in his country, the Antifaschisten target not the powerful but the marginalized. Government officials and the dominant parties feel perfectly safe with rioting antifascists who are going after an already intimidated opposition on the Right. Non-whites have joined in the widening strife throughout the Anglosphere and Western Europe, but they operate in this struggle as expendable

accessories. According to Pew Research, 46% of protesters and rioters on American streets in the spring of 2020 have been white, and overwhelmingly Democratic. Only 17% (one out of six protesters) have been black and 22% Hispanic.<sup>39</sup>

The American Antifa has borrowed its name, colors, and much of its rhetoric from the German Antifaschisten, who have been active in Germany since the 1960s, and who may be described as an exquisitely indulged feature of life in an antifascist society. Oppositional political movements have borrowed the practices of their enemies; and it has been frequently noted that certain features of German Nazism, e.g., concentration camps and the use of a vast surveillance system, were taken from the chambers of Soviet Communism. Although both Antifaschisten and Antifa seem as single-mindedly driven as other totalitarians, they lack a cohesive social vision to go with their violence. But they have been lucky in their enemies, who have not countered with enough force to discourage rampaging aggression.

Antifa and its supporters are not going away. Those who have caused unrest in the name of combatting fascism will not likely be satisfied. They will demand the right to control the streets and as a first step, the removal of the police. Then they will likely demand a share in determining social and economic policies. It may then devolve on the Left to rein in its antifascist allies as best it can.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/ellison-antifa-book/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2018/08/13/638199556/congressman-accused-of-domestic-abuse-by-former-girlfriend>

<sup>3</sup> <https://dailycaller.com/2019/09/04/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-silent-on-antifa/>

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- <sup>4</sup> <https://www.bing.com/search?q=dartmouth%20faculty%20sign%20declaration%20of%20support%20for%20mark%20Bray&cvid=8a9257b39c1d488fa446be629e273404&form=WSB>  
[BST](#)
- <sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/17/opinion/antifa-protests.html>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://www.bizpacreview.com/2020/05/30/leo-terrell-is-furious-at-fellow-dems-over-riots-im-a-black-voter-and-you-have-lost-me-if-you-dont-stand-up-to-these-criminals-927841>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://thewashingtonsentinel.com/joe-biden-allows-staffers-to-donate-bail-money-to-antifa-rioters/>
- <sup>8</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLR76\\_e\\_koE&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLR76_e_koE&feature=youtu.be)
- <sup>9</sup> [tps://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-protests-white-supremacists-antifa.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-protests-white-supremacists-antifa.html)
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/06/01/trump-antifa-terrorist-organization/>
- <sup>11</sup> See Mary Grabar’s critical examination of “Mark Bray’s Lies about Antifa” in The American Spectator (June 3, 2020), <https://spectator.org/mark-brays-lies-about-antifa/>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://pjmedia.com/news-and-politics/megan-fox/2020/06/04/new-undercover-video-blows-lid-off-antifa-domestic-terrorists-n491956>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.ammoland.com/2020/06/piles-of-bricks-staged-up-at-protest-sites-across-the-country-video/#axzz6R8tQkyVw>
- <sup>14</sup> Elizabethtown Advocate, June 11, 2020, A1 and A5.
- <sup>15</sup> The most thorough and balanced report about this clash came from the federal prosecutor Timothy Heaphy in the form of a 220-page report. <https://www.policefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Charlottesville-Critical-Incident-Review-2017.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> On the rise and decline of the Altright, see George Hawley, Making Sense of the Altright (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017)



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- <sup>17</sup> See Alexander Reid-Ross, Against the Fascist Creep (AK Press, 2017)
- <sup>18</sup> <https://attackthesystem.com/2017/02/22/against-the-anti-fascist-creeps/>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Against-Fascist-Creep-Alexander-Reid/dp/1849352445>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.uctv.tv/shows/Growing-Activism-Labor-Community-Strategy-Center-12261>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/blm-terrorist-rosenberg/>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.uctv.tv/shows/Growing-Activism-Labor-Community-Strategy-Center-12261>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.dailywire.com/news/antifa-gone-wild-no-trump-no-wall-no-usa-all-hank-berrien>
- <sup>24</sup> <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/06/09/protesters-take-over-city-blocks-in-seattle-blockade-streets-call-for-armed-guards/>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/01/seattle-mayor-orders-occupied-area-cleared-346800>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/16149/antifa-history-part-2> According to online critics, the Gatestone Institute is a “far right” institute, an epithet that supposedly discredits its findings. Although the data published by this institute may require further study, charging it with being “far right” does not amount to a refutation of its evidence.
- <sup>27</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/movement/antifa/>
- <sup>28</sup> <https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/black-lives-matter-foundation/>
- <sup>29</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/06/11/companies-are-making-bold-promises-about-greater-diversity-theres-a-long-way-to-go.html>
- <sup>30</sup> <https://www.prii.org/spotlight/religion-vote-2016/>
- <sup>31</sup> [https://www.rasmussenreports.com/public\\_content/politics/current\\_events/social\\_issues/49\\_say\\_antifa\\_is\\_a\\_terrorist\\_organization](https://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/social_issues/49_say_antifa_is_a_terrorist_organization)
- <sup>32</sup> <https://localnews8.com/politics/2020/06/08/cnn-poll-trump-losing-ground-to-biden-amid-chaotic-week/>

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- <sup>33</sup> For the definitive study of the CPUSA, see Theodore Draper's The Roots of American Communism (New York: Ivan R. Dee. 1988)
- <sup>34</sup> <https://vigilantcitizen.com/latestnews/netflix-is-losing-subscribers-in-the-us-the-untold-reason/>
- <sup>35</sup> See Heinrich Brüning, Memoiren, 1918-1945 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1970), 607=86; Richard J. Evans, The Coming of the Third Reich (New York :Penguin Books, 2003), 232-66.
- <sup>36</sup> <https://www.causeur.fr/blacks-lives-matter-big-business-reseaux-sociaux-179339>
- <sup>37</sup> <https://www.thegatewaypundit.com/2020/06/far-left-companies-pepsi-hp-doritos-paypal-adobe-bmw-pull-ads-facebook-ban-conservative-voices-president-trumps-posts>
- <sup>38</sup> Roland Baader, Totgedacht: Warum Intellektuelle unsere Welt zerstören, new edition (Lichtschlag Medien und Werbung, 2020), especially 87-93 and 233-61
- <sup>39</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Multiculturalism-Politics-Guilt-Secular-Theocracy/dp/0826215203> ; <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2020/06/24/pew-research-only-1-in-6-protesters-are-black-46-percent-are-white/>

## Chapter Two: Origins of Antifascism

Antifascism arose initially as a reaction to Italy's fascist movement and to the government that fascist leader Benito Mussolini formed in October 1922. Without such a movement taking power in a Western country as a revolutionary nationalist one, fascism might not have attracted the international acclaim or the international opposition that it aroused. Mussolini's movement had already stormed onto the historical stage in its confrontations with the revolutionary Left in the wake of the First World War. Its partisans had engaged in combat with militant socialists in 1919, after the latter had seized and occupied factories in Tuscany, the Emilia Romagna, and elsewhere in Northern Italy. Calling themselves *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento*, the fascist militants battled the well-armed "revolutionary syndicalists" in a succession of bloody encounters. By the end of this strife, three hundred fascists and four hundred revolutionary socialists fell in what had become a virtual civil war.

Although it later became customary on the Left to view the fascists as instruments of large landowners (*latifondisti*) and major industrialists (*grandi industriali*), they entered world history as self-described revolutionaries. When fascists put up candidates for office in Milan in March 1919, namely Benito Mussolini and the Futurist literary figure Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, their activists favored programs of nationalization. Future fascist Duce, Mussolini, spent most of his early life as a socialist and for a time edited the socialist paper Avanti. Mussolini broke from the Socialist Party during the First World War when he advocated war against the Central Powers, to acquire "unredeemed lands" from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His former comrades among the Arditi—raiding units that had been deployed on the Isonzo

Front against Austro-Hungarian forces—allied themselves with Mussolini's movement soon after the War.

The Arditi also took part in the seizure of Fiume under the command of the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio in 1920, after the Italian and Yugoslav governments had agreed to declare this former Hungarian port a free city. The attempted takeover of Fiume by young Italian ultranationalists collapsed when Italian royal troops forced them to surrender in December 1920. Out of this adventure, however, came an ancient Greek battle cry that the fascists later adopted: "Eia, eia, alala!" It was heard regularly at fascist rallies and translates, "Up then, Alala!" Alala, a Greek deity, was invoked in this war cry.

While the Arditi came into conflict with the new Partito Nazionale Fascista (established in November 1921) and eventually succumbed to Mussolini and his partisans, they embodied the martial spirit that came to characterize the black-shirted fascist *squadristi*.<sup>1</sup> Both groups consisted of war veterans, who were disappointed by the outcome of a costly struggle and particularly by Italy's failure to gain more territory at the expense of the defeated Central Powers. These veterans, moreover, found it hard to adjust in a country that was trying to demobilize but was being crushed economically by socialist revolutionaries. Although both the Arditi and *Fascisti* ended up in the civil unrest following World War One on the side of the factory- and landowners, they were not driven primarily by material concerns. They believed they were fighting against the internationalist enemies of their people. They were also working to restore production in a country that had been paralyzed by Socialist strikes and the occupations of factories. Both groups of revolutionary nationalists favored the slogan that epitomized their attitude: "*Me ne frego*." (In our time, this slogan, which translates "I don't give a damn," graces shirts of Italian soccer players.)

As Italian premier, Mussolini took steps in the early 1920s to consolidate his power and the centrality of his movement within the framework of the Italian state. In 1923 he passed with the support of fascist deputies the Acerbo Law, which allowed his party to gain two-thirds of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Fascists could thereafter achieve control of the Chamber by winning at least twenty-five percent of the popular vote. Over time Mussolini also weakened non-fascist organizations of workers and began to use public education to teach fascist virtues of obedience to the Duce and loyalty to the revolutionary nationalist state. Il Popolo d'Italia, which was founded in 1914, as a pro-Allied, socialist organ, remained the authorized government newspaper until 1943.

On June 30, 1924 the Duce's socialist enemy, Giacomo Matteotti rose on the floor of Chamber of Deputies and denounced his rule in a long, impassioned tirade. On June 10, Matteotti was kidnapped and then assassinated by toughs with party connections, although it was never determined whether Mussolini had advance knowledge of their deed. As soon as information about the killing spread, 150 Deputies, from the Left and Center, withdrew from the Chamber, in a dramatic protest against Mussolini's rule. This protest, known as the Aventine Secession (in memory of the action of the Roman plebeians who in the second century BC withdrew from the patrician-dominated Roman Tribal Assembly to obtain concessions) failed in its effect. The hope entertained by the opposition that King Victor Emmanuel would dismiss Mussolini's government and vindicate the secessionists was never realized. In fact, the King seemed almost relieved to be able to deal directly with his premier, without having to negotiate with troublesome opposition in the Chamber. Equally noteworthy, most of the populace quickly lost interest in the assassination. Two years later, when a few secessionists tried to reenter the national assembly, the fascist majority kept them from being seated.

This failed secession also allowed Mussolini to move toward the fusion of the Italian royal state with his party. The Grand Fascist Council came to overshadow the parliamentary government as it embraced both the executive and legislative bodies. Founded in 1922 and meeting during most of the years of fascist rule in the Palazzo Venezia, the Fascist Grand Council, according to its mandate of December 9, 1928 was “the supreme organ that coordinates and integrates all the activities of the regime emanating from the revolution of October 1922.” From this “supreme organ” a “labor charter went out in 1927 that imposed on the Italian economy a neo-medieval corporate structure. Capitalists became “providers of labor,” and their employees were turned into recipients of employment; both were fitted into a hierarchy of producers of wealth and services that existed for the benefit of the Italian state. The premier and his cabinet met with the Grand Council and decided pressing political and economic questions with its members. The Council’s dignitaries all belonged to the party and had to be approved by Mussolini. Ironically, it was this council that in 1943 relieved Mussolini of his party leadership and was complicit in having him arrested. <sup>2</sup>

Although it is now widely believed that Mussolini and his authoritarian regime were merely a front for corporate capitalists and monopolistic landowners, this was far from universally believed in the 1920s or even into the 1930s. The most diligent historian of Italian fascism, Renzo de Felice, who produced a multivolume study of more than two thousand pages on Mussolini and his rule, draws a sharp distinction between fascism as a movement and fascism as a regime.<sup>3</sup> According to de Felice, the movement that Mussolini shaped after World War I represented the nationalist sentiments of Italy’s rising bourgeoisie. It reflected disgust with “liberal” premiers like Luigi Facta and Giovanni Giolitti, who were widely seen as rotating nullities, and with a government that could not control Italy’s economic stagnation and collapse.

The fascist idealization of heroic action on behalf of the nation resonated with an educated citizenry that was not necessarily in sync with the interests of bankers and industrialists. In fact, it was not even clear whether the early fascist movement had any interest in preserving capitalism. As early as 1919 at a nationalist conference in Florence, the novelist Enrico Corradini (1865–1931), an architect of the fascist worldview, coined the term “proletarian nationalism.” Although not an advocate of a socialist economy, Corradini was aligning his country with those nations overshadowed by the “Northern European plutocrats,” whom the fascists presented as the true victors of the World War.<sup>4</sup> But Corradini and other advocates for “proletariat nations” were making mostly rhetorical points about their proletariat status. Once Mussolini seized power for himself, explains de Felice, he was free to mold the regime in accordance with his wishes. Significantly, this proved to be something less than a disaster, as Mussolini worked to accommodate the various social classes and avoided getting Italy dragged into war.

This balancing act ended when the Duce threw in his lot with Nazi Germany. Thereafter he went from enjoying a relatively benign international press, as a man of order, who between 1934 and 1936 took a strong stand against Hitler, to the Devil’s henchman. In the 1930s, Mussolini also took an increasingly authoritarian stand in domestic politics, as he tried to concentrate more political power in his person. He also began harassing the Catholic Church, with which he had made peace in the Lateran Pacts in 1929. De Felice notes the *dérapage* that marked the Italian fascist government in the 1930s, and which would be accompanied by such foreign policy adventures as the attack on Ethiopia in 1936, and Italy’s support for Nazi Germany. Mussolini’s adoption of anti-Semitism, as illustrated by his exclusion of Jews from the

party and professions in 1938, also represented a sharp break from his earlier positions. The Duce's longtime lover and biographer Margherita Sarfatti was a Sephardic Jew; the fascist Grand Council had Jewish members; and the March on Rome that brought Mussolini to power abounded with Jewish participants. After Hitler's accession to power the Duce had repeatedly denounced Hitler's anti-Semitism and was viewed by Zionist groups (some of whose members deeply admired him) as an ally.

Despite this volte face, Italian fascism for many years found supporters on the Left as well as on the Right. Ernst Nolte explained the reason when he observed that "of all movements on the right, fascism is the most leftist; just as communism may be the most rightist movement of the Left."<sup>5</sup> Fascism may in fact have looked sufficiently leftist to make it appealing to social reformers outside of Italy. Its well-wishers included FDR's brain-truster Rexford Tugwell and the editors of the then very left-of-center New Republic. The late John P. Diggins devoted his first book to American progressive intellectuals who found in Italian fascism a model for their own projects.<sup>6</sup> In Entfernte Verwandtschaft German historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch explores the extent to which New Deal advisors to FDR took seriously Mussolini's measures to offset the worldwide Depression of the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> No matter that Mussolini inflated the Italian currency and passed around devalued money to employers in order to keep their work force in place. His image as a reformer was what counted for his foreign admirers. Mussolini ran an "activist" government during a period of economic misery, and he was emphatically anti-Nazi for more than two years, which gave him cachet among progressives.

Perhaps equally relevant for understanding the progressive aspect of fascism was its association with its premier exponent, the philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944). A co-author with Mussolini of The Doctrine of Fascism, longtime fascist minister of education, and a



persistent critic of the influence of Catholic clericalism on Italian institutions, Gentile viewed himself in the tradition of Italian democratic patriots of the nineteenth century. His biographer A. James Gregor treats his subject as someone who remained focused on fascism as a movement of the future and who viewed the fascist state as child of the modern era.<sup>8</sup> Gentile's view (taken from Hegel) of History as process that continues to unfold as the actualization of Absolute Spirit testifies to his forward-oriented thinking. Gentile was also conspicuously on what seemed to be the enlightened side of critical political issues: he opposed Mussolini's pact with the Catholic Church in 1929, particularly the formative power that this agreement conceded to the Church in public education; he protested the alliance with Nazi Germany and the anti-Semitic legislation of 1938; and he tried to save Jewish colleagues from being rounded up by the Gestapo after Northern Italy fell under German control in 1944. None of this, however, prevented his assassination by the leftist resistance in Florence before war's end.

Quite possibly if Mussolini had listened to his foreign minister in the early and mid-1930s, Dino Grandi, who in 1921 had been his rival for the leadership of the National Fascist Party, he would have staved off his eventual fall. Grandi favored closer ties to Britain and staying at a safe distance from cooperation with Hitler's Germany. Like Gentile, Grandi vehemently opposed the anti-Jewish Racial Laws of 1938.<sup>9</sup> By then, however, Mussolini had fallen under the influence of other figures, for example, the fascist advocate of the laboring class, Giuseppe Bottai, who supported Nazi Germany and tried to import its doctrines selectively into Italian fascism. Curiously, some of the most "socialist"-leaning fascists were also among the most anti-Semitic.

This alternative history should indicate that fascist Italy's reputation even by the mid-1930s was hardly a settled matter. Distinctions continued to be made between a brutal Nazi

Germany and a less dictatorial anti-Communist regime in Italy which engaged in activities that the Western press generally approved of. Although Mussolini boasted of working to establish a “stato totalitario,” in which “everything would be in the state and nothing outside of it,” his rule looked strikingly different from that of his Teutonic neighbor. Jewish refugees who fled Nazi Germany were given asylum in Italy, where civil society was far freer than was the case in Nazi Germany or Stalin’s Russia.

Renowned artistic celebrities, such as conductor Arturo Toscanini, poet Giuseppe Ungaretti, playwright Luigi Pirandello, Futurist Tommaso Marinetti, and Gabriele D’Annunzio intermittently expressed sympathy for fascism, particularly during Mussolini’s early rule. In 1924, Mussolini held meetings with opera composer Giacomo Puccini regarding their shared interest in creating an Italian national theater. Shortly before Puccini’s death the following year, Mussolini had him elevated to the honor of Senator for Life. The “fascist revolution” also heavily patronized innovative architects, and Mussolini undertook a facelift of Rome that would correspond to the momentous occasion of the rebirth of his nation.<sup>10</sup> He also tried to inject artistic and literary creativity into fascist journalism. With the Duce’s blessings Popolo d’Italia featured the crème de la crème of Italian cultural life. Mussolini might have even gotten away with his repressive politics and saved his appearance as a social reformer if he had listened to those who warned him against charting a perilous foreign policy course in the late 1930s.

Perhaps most relevant for this study, only a minority of leftist journalists and politicians together with some European Communists would have decried his democracy deficit, if Mussolini had not joined the Axis and moved into Hitler’s camp. In 1924 he established diplomatic relations with Soviet Russia, and in 1933 concluded a Treaty of Friendship and Non-Aggression with Stalin. It is doubtful that most European Communist parties would have

bothered to go after a fascist leader who maintained friendly relations with the Communist motherland.

While Mussolini was turning Italy into a fascist one-party state in 1925, the attention of most of his fellow citizens was trained on other developments. The country was being hit by a sudden destabilization of the lira, which was partly produced by the need to service war debts, while the stocks of its largest companies were in wild fluctuation. The association of Italian industrialists, Confindustria, viewed Mussolini as someone who could bring order out of economic chaos, something that he managed more or less to achieve by the late 1920s.<sup>11</sup> By 1925 there were also negotiations between the Papacy and the Italian state to end the strife between them that had originated when the Kingdom of Italy seized papal territories, including the city of Rome, in 1870.<sup>12</sup> Although a pact was not concluded until 1929, over the protests of anticlerical old-guard fascists, it had been in the works for some time.

Once Mussolini placed himself on Hitler's side, however, he forfeited "world opinion." And he lost even more good will on the Left when he sent "volunteers" to fight with the Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War. This move had the effect of placing the Duce in the company of the Catholic Right. These became the natural allies of the Nationalists and General Franco, in view of the violent anticlericalism unleashed by the other side. For better or worse, fascism thereafter became associated with the traditional Right as well as Nazi Germany. Moreover, the term "fascist" was applied preeminently to Hitler's Germany, which became the most significant representative of that persuasion and form of government. Hitler and Mussolini exchanged visits to their capital cities, where they affirmed their shared ideological ground. Certain inconvenient facts went down the memory hole during these expressions of mutual admiration: e.g., that the early fascists were fanatically hostile to Germany and Austria and that

Mussolini, while celebrating “Latinity,” had often mocked Germans and their government as the “barbarians across the Alps.”

#### <A> Clericalist and Liberal Opposition

Not all of fascism’s early enemies were on the Left; and at least in the 1920s and even after, Mussolini had to contend with traditional liberal and Catholic clericalist opposition. One of his longest and most relentless opponents was Luigi Sturzo (1871–1959), the priest who organized the Partito Popolare Italiano (the PPI is a distant predecessor of the Christian Democrats) in 1919. Sturzo was known (probably incorrectly) as a “clerical socialist” who tried to fashion a party that would ally the Church to the Italian working class and impoverished peasants, particularly in Sturzo’s Sicilian homeland. His creation of the PPI caused the Papacy to remove “*non expedit*” instructions for Italian Catholics, who had previously been prohibited from voting in Italian elections. Thereafter Catholics were allowed to vote by clerical authorities, presumably to support Sturzo’s party. Much to the Vatican’s displeasure, however, the priest became a pesky adversary of Mussolini. In 1924, as a member of the Chamber of Deputies, Sturzo voted against the Acerbo Law, which was intended to provide the National Fascist Party with most of the Deputies in the assembly. Thereupon the Vatican through its emissary to the Italian state, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri, agreed to send Sturzo out of the country, to stabilize relations with Mussolini’s government. The unruly priest was assigned to an Italian monastery and from there to several residences in London, before he moved on to the United States, where he remained in exile until the end of the War.

Sturzo did not return to his native land until 1946, when he was received as a hero by the Republican, post-fascist government. The president, Luigi Einaudi, and the premier, Alcide De

Gasperi, claimed to stand in the line of Sturzo's political thought. In 1953 this apparent spiritual progenitor of the post-war government was raised with papal permission to the post of Senator for Life.

But this did not keep Sturzo from lacing into Italy's Christian Democratic establishment with the fury he had vented against Mussolini's regime.<sup>13</sup> Gasperi was concerned that Sturzo could disrupt his own pro-American political course and managed to delay his return to his native land after the war.<sup>14</sup> The sulfurous Sicilian priest uttered this sarcastic observation when he learned of Gasperi's action: "The fault of fascism is great but that of antifascism no less great." Significantly one of Sturzo's complaints about fascism, that it taught a pagan worship of the state, became a standard Catholic position during his lifetime. So too did Sturzo's attacks on fascism for denying the Christian view of the person. Augusto Del Noce, Gabriele De Rosa, and Emilio Gentile, and various contributors to the Catholic-leaning journal Review of Politics took over and recycled Sturzo's critical view of fascism.<sup>15</sup> In November 2017 the priest who never minced words underwent beatification by the Vatican and is now on his way to sainthood.

A liberal reaction, by Italian constitutionalists and opponents of Mussolini's efforts to centralize power, was also perceptible in the 1920s, and for a while, it found a voice in Italy in the cultural historian and philosopher Benedetto Croce (1866–1952). A onetime collaborator of Giovanni Gentile and a fellow-Italian Hegelian, Croce moved politically in a different direction from Gentile and in the 1920s became the tolerated voice of the opposition. Although Croce made no bones about his objections to Mussolini's transformation of the Italian parliamentary monarchy, he also hoped that by remaining in Italy as a public figure he would be able to moderate the regime. Periodically Croce would urge the Duce to restore freedom of the press and a multiparty electoral system. But the prospect for these proposals became extremely weak after

a referendum was approved in March 1929 rendering the Chamber's membership dependent on a single list provided by the Grand Council.

At the time of this plebiscite, a recognizably liberal booklet "Nuova Liberta" was circulated throughout Italy that urged all Italian parties to work together to restore constitutional liberties. This polemic may have been more instructive for what it indicated about the inherited defects of the Italian parliamentary government than for what it advocated as an alternative to the fascist regime. Only thirty to forty percent of eligible Italian voters, we are told, bothered to cast ballots between 1860 and 1924; large party blocs locked national politics in a *partitocrazia* and the parties that Mussolini drove out of the Chamber seem to have feared each other at least as intensely as they opposed the fascists. From 1919 until 1922 the Socialists had "sabotaged every attempt to bring order to the government lest the communists on their left accuse them of being 'traitors to the proletariat.'" "Nuova Liberta" raises doubts about whether the socialists could free themselves sufficiently from their Communist allies to unite with bourgeois parties against the fascist dictatorship. Finally: "In order to explain the condition to which we have been reduced, it is not enough to say that the fascists have divested us of liberty. This is only part of the truth. The other more important part of the truth is that we've made bad use of our liberty."

A more comprehensive liberal critique of fascism issued from the free-market Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises (1881–1973), who commented on the fascist regime in Italy and later, with far more concern, about the Nazi takeover in Germany.<sup>16</sup> Despite Mises's reservations about the state as "an apparatus of compulsion and suppression,"<sup>17</sup> albeit one that protects its citizens and their property from violence and enforces contracts, he was not entirely hostile to Italian fascism. Mises considered it to be a temporary expedient to deal with the radical Left's threat to life and property. The real threat that fascism represents is "that its adherents and

admirers value violent conduct for its own sake.”<sup>18</sup> To their credit, however, according to Mises, the fascists were temporarily providing “forces for a civil war in which the side with the larger numbers will prevail.” But the fascists could not supply “the intellectual weapons” that in the end would allow the liberal side to prevail: “When the vivid impression of the shameful deeds of the Bolsheviks fades from memory, then the socialist program will exert its attraction on the masses once again. Fascism cannot accomplish more in this struggle than wage war on those who spread these ideas. If we are serious about combatting socialist ideas, then we must confront them with other ideas. There is only one idea than can effectively counter socialism, which is liberalism.”

This seems to have remained Mises’s view in 1927, when he published a defense of his preferred political and economic order, Liberalismus. Like Croce, Mises did not regard Latin fascism as a sustainable experiment that would lead to a stable regime. He considered it to be a noisy, unruly antidote to socialism that would eventually be replaced by less frenetic rule. In his native Austria Mises reacted overall favorably to the clerical fascist regime of Engelbert Dollfuss, which was established in 1931 as a force against both the Nazis and revolutionary socialists. Mises regarded Dollfuss’s authoritarian government as a temporary expedient for dealing with sinister threats to civic life from the Left. But the coming to power of Hitler in Germany and his own subsequent flight from Central Europe (necessitated by his Jewish background) caused Mises to think critically about the brutal dictatorship that had established itself in Germany.

Those problems Mises associated with Italian fascism became far more unsettling in the case of the Nazis. Italian fascists, according to Mises, had the “merit that would live after them” of having lent “emergency help” against dangerous forces on the Left.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately these activists turned their conviction that “war is the natural condition of countries into a justification

for perpetual strife.” With the German Nazis, however, violence became a totally destructive way of life. Mises notes certain defects in Germany’s political history that helped explain its turning toward totalitarian solutions. Not surprisingly, this list is like what other refugee scholars were then compiling in response to the Nazi cataclysm. Germans, we are told, pursued a narrowly nationalist course in their cultural and academic life. They were less open to liberal ideas than the English and Americans and overemphasized the centrality of the state in their evolution as a nation and in the development of their industrial economy. But together with this criticism of a German Sonderweg (a particularistic, illiberal path to political and economic modernity), which today may be a veritable fixation among German academics and journalists, Mises focused on the German penchant for state bureaucracy as a precondition for Nazi dictatorship.

In a later book, Bureaucracy, published in English with Yale University Press in 1944, Mises identifies German National Socialism as a particularly virulent form of socialism. National Socialists embraced a worldview and economic policy deeply rooted in the Prussian glorification of public administration. Mises insisted that private ownership of the means of production existed *in name only* under the Nazis and that true ownership of the means of production resided in the German government. It was *the German government* and not nominal private owners that exercised the *substantive powers of ownership* in the Third Reich. It was no longer nominal private owners who decided what was to be produced, in what quantity, by what methods, and to whom it was to be distributed, as well as the prices that would be charged and the wages that would be paid. Putative private owners, according Mises, were reduced to government pensioners. He further insisted that the proliferating, strangling state bureaucracy that thrived under the Nazis were entirely different from positions in the private sector. Private employees



even in large corporations were answerable to stockholders and market forces. This was not true under the state socialism that after January 1933 prevailed in Nazi Germany.

The pro-welfare state or socialist Left responded to such broadsides by pointing out that “democratic” states have produced expansive public administrations, without experiencing the horrors that drove Mises into exile. Mises might have rejoined however that a vast state bureaucracy may not be a sufficient cause but can most definitely contribute to centralized dictatorship. One could also argue that an unopposed administrative behemoth works against inherited freedoms, even if it does so less destructively than Nazism.<sup>20</sup> A final point: Nazism would have been far less dangerous internally and internationally if it had not enjoyed state power. No matter how unpleasant an ideology may seem to us, absent state power it cannot crush all opposition, let alone, engage in mass murder.

#### <A> The Marxist Response

In the 1930s and during the Second World War, a systematic Marxist critique of Nazism, and more generally of fascism, crystallized among Central European Jewish intellectuals.<sup>21</sup> Members of this group dealt critically not only with capitalism as a social and economic phenomenon but also with Mises’s distinction between private corporations and public administration. Franz Neumann (1900–1954) stands out among German Marxists who conferred special attention on classical liberal positions as an alternative to his socialist thinking. Neumann knew Mises’s work well and makes references to it in his classic Behemoth, which was published in the US in 1944.<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, Behemoth found admirers on the Left as soon as it appeared. Herbert Marcuse, who then was already a prominent spokesman for the Frankfurt School, was drawn to Neumann’s work because it explored the connection between corporate industrial power and the

Nazi government. Like Marcuse, Neumann spent much of his life as a far-Left activist who developed close ties to the Communist Party. Despite this engagement it is nonetheless possible to separate Neumann's compelling analysis of Nazism from Communist partisanship. In key points, his analysis overlaps that of Mises and the Austrian Marxists Karl Kautsky and Rudolf Hilferding. Like these figures, Neumann viewed the consolidation of state power as basic for understanding the Nazis' seizure of power and their success in destroying adversaries.

According to Neumann, the Nazis, like the less violent Italian fascists, forged a fateful alliance among corporate capitalists, government administrators, the army, and assorted nationalist groups. Whence the appearance of a highly centralized state, resembling Thomas Hobbes "mortal deity," an early image for a sovereign state that absorbs into itself all human associations. As a Marxist Neumann stressed the crisis of advanced capitalism propelling this alliance, but he also looked at the role of state power and other forces that helped build the "Nazi Behemoth." In Neumann's formulation, the political-economic coalition that resulted in the Nazi state could only lead to a truculent foreign policy and steady internal repression. The capitalist class required such actions to prevent an internal economic crisis that would otherwise lead to a workers' revolution and the reorganization of society in accordance with rational socialist principles. Faithful to the Marxist view that fascism, especially in its Nazi form, was an attempt to upend and suppress socialist revolution, Neumann insisted on a Marxist revolutionary solution.

Curiously, his argument met dogged resistance from another Frankfurt School aficionado Friedrich Pollock (1894–1970), who to the scandal of his circle insisted that Neumann's "behemoth" could assume relatively benign forms in some Western societies. Pollock noticed that public administration and corporate capitalists could work together in a way that gave the

appearance of being democratic and which could attract majority support in advanced industrial countries. Pollock cited the US as an example of the effectiveness of this new political order based on managerial cooperation and without the militaristic features of Nazi Germany.<sup>23</sup> His analysis, which was mostly confined to commentaries, easily segued into an examinations of the managerial revolution, a theme that pervaded the work of such disaffected Trotskyites as Bruno Rizzi and James Burnham.<sup>24</sup> These onetime Marxist thinkers understood fascism as a particular form of managerial organization that stressed national cohesion. For geopolitical reasons that did not characterize the US as a great continental power, managerial states in Europe felt driven to engage in risky military adventures, a tendency that became truly explosive with the advent of fascist regimes.

Neumann argued furiously against Pollock's concept of a self-stabilizing state capitalism in correspondence with Max Horkheimer. He indicated that one of the reasons he undertook Behemoth was to demonstrate that there was no future to the existing economic system once it had reached the stage of "totalitarian monopoly capitalism." According to Neumann, "the contradictions of capitalism in Germany have become effective at a higher and therefore more perilous level, even if the existing contradictions were disguised through a bureaucratic apparatus and the ideology of a people's community." Pollock's theory supposedly created an overly positive picture of capitalism as it presently existed or was imagined existing in certain Western countries. This interpretation, according to Neumann, would be damaging, if a flawed economic model were presented as an alternative to the Nazi state. Neumann finally castigated Pollock for denying the *raison d'être* of the transplanted Institute, by "departing unmistakably from its Marxist purpose."<sup>25</sup>

The conceptualization of the Nazi dictatorship as a hypertrophied modern state can likewise be found in the posthumously edited and published writings of Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), who was a leading Austrian Marxist theorist and often referred to as “the Pope of Marxism.” Kautsky’s devotion to Marx’s views of history and capitalism shaped much of his scholarly oeuvre and his longtime editorship of Die Neue Zeit, a journal of high socialist theory founded in Stuttgart in 1883. After the Bolshevik takeover of Russia, Kautsky engaged in a prolonged conflict with the pro-Soviet wing of European socialism; and as is well documented, he and Lenin became implacable enemies.<sup>26</sup> As early as 1919 Kautsky published a blistering attack on Soviet Bolshevism as an exercise in “terrorism” and “a new form of Tartar dictatorship” that Western socialists should emphatically repudiate. According to this criticism, Lenin’s rule represented a “regression into barbaric conditions, and the Alpha and Omega of its ruling strategy is simply to shoot people.”<sup>27</sup> After years of battling the pro-Soviet wing of European socialism, Kautsky ended his life in the Netherlands, in forced exile from a Nazi-controlled Germany. There he watched the transformation of the modern state into whatever grotesque forms it assumed under the Nazis and Soviets.

The exiled socialist expressed concerns about these totalitarian developments without ever fully abandoning his Marxist premises. He went on believing that a crisis of monopoly capitalism had led to both imperialism and political dictatorship. Nonetheless, it is possible to trace a line of descent from Kautsky’s perceptions about uncontrolled political administration to later, more systematically developed interpretations of totalitarianism. Franz Borkenau, Rudolf Hilferding,<sup>28</sup> Hannah Arendt, and other witnesses to the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships who came out of Central European Marxist circles, eventually shifted their focus from the contradictions of capitalism to studies about operationally similar totalitarian regimes. These observers recognized

there were extensive structural and ideological links between the German catastrophe and what they saw happening in the Soviet state.

They also meditated on why a socialist revolution of the kind that Marx had predicted did not occur or seem likely to take place. They began to view a runaway modern state as a principal actor in establishing a new kind of regime. Nazi and Bolshevik leaders managed to erect their own collectivist governments, while making a fetish out of denouncing “liberal capitalism.” But they treated economic relations as a tool for increasing personal control by those who took charge of the political apparatus. In such centralized governments, the political did not conform to the classical Marxist analysis, as a development of secondary importance. Rather the state became the driving force that shaped human wills and suppressed its declared enemies.

Although there were admittedly Marxist interpreters of fascism and Nazism outside of Central Europe, those that came from this region were particularly rigorous and scholarly. They were not just reacting to leading events, in the way Italian socialists periodically denounced the fascist government from Paris or New York.<sup>29</sup> They started with a social theory that they tried to apply to a political crisis; and despite their initial dedication to Marxist theory, these theorists would modify their conceptual framework in order to bring it into line with available facts. The same attitude obtained among economic liberals, who examined events based on their understanding of power relations and the operation of public administration.

Italian antifascists may have been less systematic at least partly because they were fighting what looked mostly like a run-of-the-mill dictatorship. It was a government that, according to its critics, featured clever demagogues who promised the gullible material benefits in return for abandoning their liberties. In a famous letter to the exile newspaper Corriere degli Italiani in March 1927, longtime head of the Italian Socialist Party Pietro Nenni (1891–1980)

compared Mussolini to Napoleon III, the nephew of the great Napoleon who elevated himself through a plebiscite in 1853 to the rank of Emperor of the French. Louis Napoleon achieved this by appearing to be all things to all people. Marx, Nenni reminds us, had written perceptively about this political adventurer, who rose to political prominence after the French Revolution of 1848.

Nenni's response was a call to action in which his allies would be "drawing over to the antifascist side international public opinion, inundating Italy with clandestine newspapers, and extending ties to antifascists over the Alps as well as on the Italian side of them." Further: "Even if the tyranny that the masses seek to overthrow makes concessions when confronted by the turmoil of the public place, History will not save Mussolini any more than it saved Napoleon III." Finally: "This will be the response of events even sooner once we organize for the struggle that lies ahead. We can do this by relying on concrete positive elements, ceasing to fight among ourselves and uniting against the enemy that tramples on (*calpesta*) and humiliates us."<sup>30</sup>

Nenni's call to action seems to appeal to whatever was needed to overthrow a personal dictatorship; and there was good reason for this. Italian fascism looked far less sinister in 1927 than Nazism did after Hitler took power in January 1933.

"Fascism as a government," to use de Felice's phrase, was generally far less brutal and totalitarian than its German counterpart, and unlike Nazi rule, il Duce could have applied the brakes in the 1930s before he slid into disaster. His regime therefore offered a far less grim target than the government of his future Axis-partner over the Alps. During most of Mussolini's rule, his opponents in Paris had difficulty even keeping their adversarial press afloat. The editor of Corriere degli Italiani and Sturzo's devotee in the Partito Popolare, Giuseppe Donati, worked overtime to preserve a united antifascist front, even without the Communists. Socialists and the

bourgeois parties bickered constantly with each other, and it seemed to Donati that a new “democratic citizen” may have been necessary to combat fascism.<sup>31</sup> The German situation caused greater alarm and generally more thoughtfulness among its enemies. Opponents of the Nazis were dealing with a far more deadly and more aggressive enemy than Mussolini’s government and therefore felt compelled to provide a detailed, systematic study of this historical problem. The fact that most of them were Jewish and subject to special mistreatment may have made them even more determined to understand the new political reality in Germany.

One of the most impressive studies of this kind came from German legal theorist and longtime German labor lawyer Ernst Fraenkel (1898–1975), who in The Dual State (1941) famously distinguished between two political entities both present in the Nazi regime, a normative state and a prerogative one. The first kind of state adhered to those laws it enacted and treated all German citizens as legal equals. The other state, which was subject to the Nazi Party, broke established legal arrangements whenever it suited its purposes. It was the second state which came to overshadow the first from the day the Nazis took power.<sup>32</sup> Fraenkel associated himself with Marxists but his critical examination of the prerogative state (*Maßnahmenstaat*) was clearly not of Marxist origin. One finds evidence of the famous interwar debate between the normativist theorist Hans Kelsen and the brilliant defender of authoritarian government Carl Schmitt in the works of Fraenkel and in those of a likeminded colleague, Otto Kirchheimer (1900–1965). Although the events-driven studies produced by Fraenkel, Kirchheimer, and others of their background took varied forms, a Marxist materialist worldview would not have been foundational for their arguments.

There was however one constant Marxist reference point in the work of these thinkers, namely a belief that political actors were pursuing their ends rationally. They attributed to those

fascists or Nazis whom they critically studied Max Weber's concept of Zweckrationalität.<sup>33</sup>

Without getting into a complicated sociological concept in Weber's work, it might be noted that this great social thinker argued strenuously that the choice of adequate, carefully considered means to achieve an end could be "rational" even if one disputed the morality or soundness of an actor's goal. The person making the decision established a causal connection between his means and the ends he wished to reach. For Marxist scholars in interwar Europe, the ends being sought were also rational to the extent that they conformed to the fascists' material and/or political interests. Their critics presented those who came to power in Germany in the 1930s as rational beings, to the extent they were consciously and methodically pursuing their interests. These interests and how certain people pursued them were far from admirable, but they were understandable in terms of those who sought power or desired to hold on to their fortunes. Those found in these positions predictably formed alliances with or worked to create governments that would enable them to advance their goals. But Frankfurt School luminaries, like Eric Fromm, Theodor Adorno, and Wilhelm Reich criticized the narrowness of this approach. They insisted that sexual repression and sadomasochistic abnormalities had to be factored in to grasp the appeal of Nazism and fascism in general. German Jewish Marxists in American exile became preoccupied with the psychological underpinnings of anti-Semitism; and eventually they produced the Studies in Prejudice series for the American Jewish Committee that highlighted the morbid, repressed aspect of the Nazi "mentality."

There was also a noticeable division of interests in how German refugees analyzed the fascist or Nazi problem. Neumann wrote Behemoth as a structural and economic interpretation of the Nazi state, but this did not prevent him from engaging simultaneously in his own speculations about anti-Semitism. It is also clear that not all studies about anti-Semitism as a



historic problem have stressed psychic abnormalities. They have also focused on those cultural, social, and religious circumstances that have engendered and sustained anti-Jewish sentiments. This was certainly true of Neumann's preoccupation with the roots of anti-Jewish feelings that he believed fueled Nazi anti-Semitism. Neumann's devotee Marcuse, however, evinced no special interest in anti-Jewish prejudice as a long-standing evil.<sup>34</sup> And though Marcuse wrote voluminously on the erotic deprivation caused by advanced capitalist society, he was attracted to Neumann's work primarily because of its analysis of the alliance between industrial capitalism and the German military and governing classes.

There were also other views circulating about the irrationality of Nazism outside the psychic interpretations advanced by members of the Frankfurt School and their American votaries. Although not without merit, these views do not directly bear on this study and will only be noted in passing. Here mention might be made of those who stressed the mythic elements that informed Nazi ideology, investigators of Nazism as a form of modern nihilism, and interpreters of the Gnostic, counter-Orthodox Christian currents in the Nazi Apocalypse. Authors who raised these interpretations, for example, Mircea Eliade, Hermann Rauschning, Eric Voegelin and Hans Jonas,<sup>35</sup> were serious observers of their time; and their writings can still be read with considerable profit. But their views were never the dominant academic or political ones cited to explain fascism or Nazism. Whether these interpretations have become entertainment on today's History Channel or the central theme of someone's followers, they do not fit into the historiographical mainstream; nor have they impacted politics in any significant way. It is equally extraneous for this book whether psychologists tell us that Hitler was mentally sick or suffering from syphilis. Although such conjectures may be worth pondering, they do not affect the mainstream discussions among "experts." And we are looking here at how academics,

journalists, and others deemed significant intellectuals have understood fascism and Nazism since the 1920s.

The other point that warrants mention is that we are assuming that the movement or movements in question were historically specific. Fascism and Nazism are not free-floating concepts but are anchored in a well-defined temporal-spatial framework and refer to ascertainable actors and events. The most cogent critics of fascism and Nazism studied the object of their investigation through an intensive examination of economic, cultural, and institutional arrangements. They related their studies to concrete historical contexts and avoided speculation about an eternal fascist enemy. An alternative mindset eventually prevailed but that happened mostly after the Axis powers were defeated.

Critical analysis of fascist actors in interwar Europe gave way to a novel enterprise. It became, among other things, the favored term of political scolds and those who sought to trample on the historical liberties of those who offended them. Surveying an earlier stage of this continuing process, Italian filmmaker (and longtime enemy of both fascism and the Catholic Church) Pier Paolo Pasolini memorably observed in 1974, “Nulla di peggio del fascismo degli antifascisti (nothing about fascism seems quite as bad as the antifascists).”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For the most detailed treatment of Mussolini’s early life and the formation of the fascist party, see Renzo de Felice, Mussolini il Rivoluzionario 1883–1920 (Milan: Einaudi, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> For the definitive organization of the labor corporations and the Gran Consiglio, see the appendix to Renzo de Felice’s Mussolini il fascista, II, L’organizzazione dello Stato fascista,” (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1968), 542-53.

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- <sup>3</sup> For the upshot of an illuminating interview with de Felice and his reasons for doing research on the fascist period, see Michael E. Ledeen, “Renzo de Felice and the Controversy over Italian Fascism,” Journal of Contemporary History 11.4 (October 1976), 269-83.
- <sup>4</sup> Fabio Filippi, Una Vita Pagana: Enrico Corradini dal Superromismo Dannunziano a una Politica di Massa (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1989)
- <sup>5</sup> Ernst Nolte, Der kausale Nexus.Über Revisionen und Revisionismen in der Geschichtswissenschaft (Munich: Herbig, 2002), 45-46.
- <sup>6</sup> John P. Diggins, Mussolini and Fascism: The View from America (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972).
- <sup>7</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Entfernte Verwandtschaften: Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus, New Deal 1933–1939 (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2005), 25-36, 136-42.
- <sup>8</sup> A. James Gregor, Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2001); for a far more comprehensive English-language biography of Gentile, see H.S. Harris, The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960).
- <sup>9</sup> See Renzo de Felice, The Jews in Fascist Italy (Oxford: Enigma Books, 2001) and Michele Sarfatti, The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy: From Equality to Persecution, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne C. Tedeschi (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).
- <sup>10</sup> A surprisingly detailed discussion of Mussolini’s patronage of the arts and architecture can be found in Werner Brauningner’s Dux:Mussolini oder der Wille zur Macht (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2018), 122-70. Like Nicholas Farrell’s massive biography Mussolini: A New Life (Phoenix Books, 2005), Brauningner’s work has been dismissed for whitewashing an oppressive dictator. But both Farrell and Brauningner address a question that goes begging

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in most account of Mussolini's rule, which is why an earlier generation across the political spectrum idolized il Duce. See also my commentary [https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/12/a\\_successful\\_disruption.html](https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/12/a_successful_disruption.html). For an unrelievedly critical biography of Mussolini by the dean of English historians of Italy, see Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini: A Biography (New York: Knopf, 1982). Smith's longtime dispute with de Felice, whom he accused of "rehabilitating Mussolini," is discussed in the sketch of his life in Corriere dell Sera (July 12, 2017), [https://www.corriere.it/cultura/17\\_luglio\\_12/denis-mack-smith-morto-storia-italia-inghilterra-cavour-garibaldi-mussolini-2113c918-6726-11e7-9cb7-9d56a32dcee8.shtml](https://www.corriere.it/cultura/17_luglio_12/denis-mack-smith-morto-storia-italia-inghilterra-cavour-garibaldi-mussolini-2113c918-6726-11e7-9cb7-9d56a32dcee8.shtml).

<sup>11</sup> Renzo de Felice, Mussolini il fascista, II, "L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista," (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1968), 81-93.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 101-13.

<sup>13</sup> <https://digitalis-dsp.uc.pt/bitstream/10316.2/39534/1/Don%20Luigi%20Sturzo%20a%20man.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> From 1947 until his death in 1959, Sturzo, a passionate decentralist and enemy of Italy's post-fascist restored partitocrazia, raged against the Christian Democratic government. For these collected critical commentaries, see Luigi Sturzo, Servir non servirsi: La prima regola del buon politico (Rubettino, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> For a treatment of this Catholic antifascist position and its post-World War Two ramifications, see my book Fascism: Career of a Concept (DeKalb: NIU Press, 2016) especially 43-47, 137-44.

<sup>16</sup> For a thorough biography of Ludwig von Mises by a disciple, see Jörg Guido Hülsmann, Mises: The Last Knight of Liberalism (Auburn, Alabama: Mises Institute, 2007).

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- <sup>17</sup> Ludwig von Mises, Liberalismus, new printing (Sankt Augustin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 50-51.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 44.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid., 45-46; the reader is also referred to the English edition of this work, Liberalism, trans. Ralph Raico, preface by Bettina Bien Greaves (Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, 1985), 47-51, and to Karlheinz Weissmann's essay "Faschismus-liberal" in Sezession (March 9, 2007) <https://sezession.de/2383/faschismus-liberal>.
- <sup>20</sup> See Paul Gottfried, Afer Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Administrative State (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), especially 135-44.
- <sup>21</sup> An indispensable study on the "golden age" of Marxist theory is Leszek Kolakowski's Main Currents of Marxism, paperback edition (Norton: New York, 2008)
- <sup>22</sup> Franz Neumann, Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism 1933-1944, second revised edition (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1944). See also Alfred Söllner's edited posthumously published essays of Neumann, Wirtschaft, Staat, Demokratie, 1930-1954 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978); and Duncan Kelly's essay "Rethinking Franz Neumann's Route to 'Behemoth,'" History of Political Thought 23.3 (Autumn 2002), 458-86.
- <sup>23</sup> See Friedrich Pollock's essays in Studien des Kapitalismus, edited by Helmut Dubiel (Munich: Beck Verlag, 1975); and Rolf Wiggershaus, Die Frankfurter Schule: Geschichte, Theoretische Entwicklung, Politische Bedeutung, sixth edition (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2001), 301-27, 401-28.
- <sup>24</sup> James Burnham, The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening in the World (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1962); Bruno Rizzi, The Bureaucratization of the World, trans. Adam Westoby (New York: Free Press, 1985). For an informative assessment of

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Rizzi's place as a social theorist, see Ernest E. Haberkern's review of The Bureaucratization of the World in Telos (66), 162-67

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Wiggerhaus, 320-21.

<sup>26</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of Kautsky's formulation of Marxism, see Jukka Gronow, On the Formation of Karl Kautsky's Theory of Capitalism, the Marxism of the Second International, and Karl Marx's Critique of Political Economy (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2016), and especially 190-208 for Kautsky's dispute with Lenin.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Kautsky, Terrorismus und Kommunismus: Ein Beitrag zur Naturgeschichte der Revolution (Charlottenburg, 191), 40, 152. Lenin's right-hand man Leon Trotsky famously replied to Kautsky's brief in 1920 in Kommunismus und Terrorismus. Antikautsky (Hamburg, 1920)

<sup>28</sup> Particularly relevant here are the introduction to Rudolf Hilferding's "Das historische Problem, Archiv für Politik (1953), 295-303, furnished by Benedict Kautsky, Karl Kautsky's son; Franz Borkenau, The Totalitarian Enemy (London: Faber and Faber, 1940); and Hannah Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), especially 301-390.

<sup>29</sup> In Mussolini il fascista, 480-84, de Felice tells us that Mussolini's democratic and socialist opposition saved the honor of the antifascist side, because they refused to accept his offer of collaboration. It is quite possible the opposition did not believe Mussolini would keep his word if they returned to Italy.

<sup>30</sup> Reproduced in the appendix to Mussolini il fascista, II, 563-67.

<sup>31</sup> See "Il Corriere degli Italiani: La Parabola di un quotidiana antifascista in Francia," L'Ecole Francaise de Rome 94 (1986), 285-321.

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<sup>32</sup> Ernst Fraenkel, The Dual State: A Contribution to the Theory of Dictatorship, trans. E. Shils and intro. by Jens Meierhenrich, paperback (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Max Weber, Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), 118-45.

<sup>34</sup> Wiggershaus, Die Frankfurter Schule, 429-31.

<sup>35</sup> See Mircea Eliade, Mythes, rêve, et mystères (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); Eric Voegelin, the New Science of Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952) and Wissenschaft, Politik und Gnosis (Munich: Kosel und Pustet, 1959); Hermann Rauschning, The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West (Whitefish, MT: Kessering Press, 2005); and Hans Jonas, The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

<sup>36</sup> This observation, from Pasolini's Scritti Corsari, is reproduced on an Italian libertarian website <https://secolo-trentino.com/politica/pasolini-quella-profezia-sugli-antifascisti/>.

## Chapter Three: Post-World War Two Antifascism

The following survey of the major trends in antifascism after the Second World War will focus on three intersecting defensive strategies. Each of them represented a departure from the more analytic approaches that were characteristic of interwar examinations of fascist thought and practice. These strategies were sometimes applied jointly in the attempt to cleanse the political culture of fascist legacies. All these strategies were predicated on the belief that what was targeted was a deeply embedded evil that despite the defeat of the Axis powers in 1945, still endangered the survival of democracy. Not surprisingly, the advocates of all three approaches turned to the state and massive social engineering as essential for promoting their work.

Although antifascist reformers opposed the statist authoritarianism practiced by the Right, they readily endorsed coercive methods, providing they helped keep at bay a putative fascist danger. The three approaches espoused were forced reeducation in the case of the Germans, the treatment of fascism as a form of pathology that required prolonged therapeutic treatment, and the production and distribution of pedagogical (that is to say, penitential) historiography accentuating the disastrous results of living under a reactionary social order. Antifascists have typically favored the use of more than one of these three approaches. The evil they wish to combat is seen as so pervasive that countering it may require every available resource. Whichever the method to be applied, however, guilt and penance are the necessary accompaniments of the mind formation that antifascists are intent on fostering.

### <A>German Reeducation as a Template

A former Yale professor of philosophy, who is now associated with the Free University in Berlin, Susan Neiman, has written an entire book Learning from the Germans about what she



considers one of antifascism's greatest moral achievements since 1945.<sup>1</sup> Neiman supports the reeducation of the Germans under Allied supervision and the subsequent antifascist atonement of the Germans as a history that Americans would do well to imitate. Although Neiman stops short of calling Trump another Hitler, she stresses the similarity between these two “evil” leaders in fomenting bigotry. Neiman sees the German example of “overcoming the past” as one that her own country should follow, once it manages to free itself from its present racist, authoritarian ruler.

Neiman also has kind words in her book and in an interview with The Guardian for the now dissolved East German Communist regime, in which antifascism was a continuing political and educational mission. Under the Communists, there was no chance that the German people would ever revive their fascist legacy, although the price for this protection was a regime that curtailed civil liberties. Quite possibly, we are led to believe, this will be necessary for the US as we battle white supremacy.<sup>2</sup> In any case Neiman is insisting that we look at Germany's “path toward the West,” to use a favorite phrase of antinational German academics, in order to understand the example we should be emulating. Much of this path was imposed by Germany's conquerors from across the Atlantic, but it became in time the model of antifascist reeducation and social engineering for non-Germanic countries and may now help Americans overcome their past. Neiman's path toward the West does not have much to do with Western civilization, or not until quite recently. Plato, Aquinas, Luther, Hobbes, Pascal, Machiavelli, Hegel, and other Western thinkers would not qualify as members of Neiman's late modern notion of the West.

May 8, 1945 is now the official date for the defeat of Nazi Germany (in Russia it is May 9). The end of the Second World War in Europe still provides an occasion for celebration, and not only for the four major victors, the US, Russia, Great Britain, and France. Equally

noteworthy, the government, media and educational institutions of the defeated Germans celebrate May 8 as a “day of liberation” from their previous tyrannical regime. This overlooks the fact that after that date the defeated Germans were exposed to harsh treatment from their conquerors. For months after the war, the Western Allies limited food supplies to the starving Germans to about 1,250 calories per person. (Inhabitants of what were deemed “friendly countries” were at that time allowed 2,000 calories in daily food supplies.) The caloric intake for Germans, who did not farm their own food, was finally raised to about 1,500 calories by the beginning of 1946. Even more appallingly, hundreds of thousands of Germans were kept in detention camps well into 1946, and many were maltreated.<sup>3</sup> The inhabitants of central or eastern Germany who remained within a German state fell under a Soviet dictatorship thereafter known as the German Democratic Republic.<sup>4</sup>

The four major belligerent powers (France had been added by then) formally arranged for the occupation of a soon to be defeated Germany in February 1945. By then the Allied Control Council that came into existence after Germany’s unconditional surrender had already existed on paper for several months. Plans for the occupation of Germany went back even further into the war years. In the US both military and civilian officials were instructed on how they would administer the Germans, once they were defeated, at the University of Virginia as early as 1942. A plan put forth by Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau and Undersecretary Harry Dexter White, called for harsh treatment of the defeated population in order to avoid World War Three. These proposals gained acceptance in principle from FDR and (more tentatively) from Churchill at the Second Quebec Conference in September 1944.

Although the Morgenthau Plan was modified in some of its more vindictive features, e.g., demanding the fragmentation of Germany into multiple separately administered regions, turning

the country in a subsistence-level rural society, destroying German industry or transferring it to Soviet Russia, it is possible to recognize elements of the original plan in the policies implemented during the occupation of Germany. White, who turned out to be a Soviet informant, called for Russian access to Germany's Ruhr region, which was heavily industrialized and full of iron ore. But this proposal was given short shrift. At least one aspect of the Morgenthau-White proposals, however, cast a long shadow on post-war Germany. This offered a detailed blueprint for the forced instruction of the impoverished German population in antifascist teachings. This instruction was undertaken, even though the Morgenthau Plan was not officially in force.

From July 17 through August 2, 1945 a critical conference in Potsdam among the victorious powers, resulted in fateful decisions regarding the defeated Germans. A proposal put forth by Eastern European countries to expel their ethnic Germans received approval at this time from the major powers. Before this resettlement ended, close to 15 million Volks- and Reichsdeutsche (Germans from former German territory and those from countries where they were minorities) were driven from ancestral lands,<sup>5</sup> with hundreds of thousands dying during what was described by the Allies as a population exchange. Arrangements were also made at Potsdam to allow the Poles to annex lands in Central Germany east of the Oder-Neisse Rivers. Meanwhile Poland's Eastern territories (with their mixed Polish-Ukrainian populations) were given to the Soviet Union, which was then expanding westward. Perhaps equally important for Germany's post-war political culture, plans were worked out at Potsdam to hold war trials, the purpose of which was to demonstrate to the world the evil character of the regime that the Allies had just defeated. The major phase of these trials lasted from November 20, 1945 until October 1, 1946 and featured notorious war criminals brought before an International Military Tribunal.

Nazi leaders who were put on trial were either executed (if they did not anticipate the hangman by committing suicide) or condemned to spend decades or lifetimes in prison.

Worthwhile questions were raised at this time and during the trials of lesser malefactors concerning the procedure's legality, most importantly, whether it furnished a dubious precedent for other extra-legal international trials.<sup>6</sup> In the US Senator Robert Taft caused an uproar by raising such questions, in defiance of both national parties, and in England Winston Churchill expressed reservations about what became the Nuremberg Trials, when he learned about them, as early as 1943. Churchill suggested that Nazi leaders who had committed particularly heinous crimes should be summarily shot. A legal irregularity that would become a precedent, argued Churchill, might have worse results than meting out ex post facto justice.<sup>7</sup> Some charges against the eventual defendants, such as "conspiring against the peace," were in fact manufactured for the occasion.

Eventually it became clear that Soviet-appointed judges at Nuremberg were punishing German leaders for acts that their government had been equally complicit in, e.g., attacking Poland in September 1939 during the Soviet-Nazi Pact. The main Soviet judge at the trials, Iona Nitichenko, had previously presided over the show trials conducted by Stalin between 1936 and 1938, when the Soviet tyrant turned on and decided to execute his former Communist associates.<sup>8</sup> Such details gave the trials an appearance of hypocrisy that its critics were all too willing to bring up. Then there were the questions of the terror bombing of civilians engaged in during the war by the Americans and British and the rapes and murders of German civilians committed by the invading Russian armies in the winter of 1945.<sup>9</sup> Although it would be foolish to compare such deeds to the acts of mass extermination carried out by the Third Reich, the role of moral judges assumed by the Allied Powers may not look as convincing in retrospect as it did

immediately after the war. One may reach this conclusion without in any way condoning truly shocking Nazi atrocities, which befell my own relatives who failed to leave Europe in time.

Despite these reservations, the trials were an enormous success in changing cultural and political attitudes; and their effects on German society can still be discerned in the country's self-absorbed atonement for its national past. Contrary to certain misconceptions, the work of the trials went on for years after its most publicized phase ended in October 1946. Lesser Nazi officials were also tried, and those who were in any way associated with the fallen regime had to undergo "denazification" to determine their degree of involvement with the Third Reich. Anyone whose name came up in reference to Nazi-related activities was forced to fill out detailed questionnaires (*Fragebogen*) concerning his contacts with the previous government.<sup>10</sup> Authors and thinkers who were linked to the prewar national Right or any anti-Communist movement were forbidden to set up or write for Allied-approved publications and sometime were interned. This was even true for opponents of the Nazis who were burdened by insufficiently antifascist affiliations.<sup>11</sup> Although the non-Soviet-controlled parts of Germany were allowed to form a constitutional government in 1949 (under Allied supervision), the Allied High Commission oversaw German affairs until 1955.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to process these details since they help qualify the view that by the onset of the Cold War efforts at reeducating the Germans had largely stopped. The need to contain the Soviets and to re-industrialize and eventually rearm Germany, supposedly came to overshadow the initial determination of the Allied High Commission and their advisers to combat the fascist spirit. But there was in fact no sudden about-face taking place in how the Commission addressed the task of reeducation or getting the Germans to overcome their past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*). Into the 1950s the occupation government determined who would

be allowed to receive a license to publish and distribute printed material. The educational curricula of the German Länder and the social studies and history textbooks adopted for German public education reflected the obligatory universalist, antifascist outlook of Germany's post-Nazi government. German courts routinely banned political parties that were held to be threats to democracy. Certainly not all such banned parties constituted a threat to the constitutional order. Some of these banned parties, like those attracting regionalist and monarchists in Bavaria, were outlawed because they generated unwanted competition for the main parties, namely those that were organized under Allied supervision and which were charged with constructing the popular will in an approved political direction.

It is however true that under the Christian Democratic government of Konrad Adenauer and his successor Ludwig Erhard more stress was placed on economic growth and resisting the Soviet bloc than atoning for the Nazi past. Moreover, the post-War electoral victories of anti-Communist Republicans in the US and the shift of West European politics toward the Right with the onset of the Cold War helped soften Western attitudes toward the defeated Germans. But under the Social Democratic government of Willy Brandt, who was Chancellor from 1969 to 1974, the theme of making restitution for Germany's history under the Third Reich became again a priority.

Whether it was Brandt's negotiation of peace agreements with Communist states in Eastern Europe, in which he ceded already lost German territory and apologized for Nazi crimes, or his ostentatious embrace of cosmopolitanism, the social democratic chancellor became a transformational figure. He was widely acclaimed for breaking from the business-as-usual attitude of Germany's anti-Communist Christian Democrats and for moving toward the more self-consciously antifascist Germany that exists today. The Sixty-Eighters, who led student

revolts in the late 1960s, were a complementary force in establishing a more contrite, antinationalist Germany. These rebels, some of whom attained high places in the German government and journalism, always warned against German fascism and regarded West Germany's alliance with the Americans as tantamount to a return to the Nazi past.

After reunification in 1991 Germans moved ever more directly toward antifascism as a state ideology. The remark by a former foreign affairs minister and onetime violent socialist revolutionary Josef Fischer that Auschwitz is the founding myth of the German Federal Republic has become more no less true since German unification. The vital center of German parliamentary politics is found today on the multicultural Left, and the boast of German Chancellor Angela Merkel that Germany has no right of center party that will be allowed to govern may for better or worse be true. The only German party that is openly patriotic, Alternative für Deutschland, polls between 11 and 13 percent nationwide; and no German coalition will consider allowing this deviationist party into a government. The AfD is made up mostly of disaffected Christian Democrats, who challenge Angela Merkel's immigration policy.

We are therefore looking at the now embedded self-image of Germans as antifascist cosmopolites, an image that their conquerors labored mightily to instill in the conquered country. Illustrating this negative picture of the national past were the mobs of young enthusiasts who swelled the streets of major German cities in 1996 to welcome Daniel Goldhagen, the controversial historian who had published a remarkable anti-German tract. In Hitler's Willing Executioners, Goldhagen contends with less than convincing evidence that the German people at least since the nineteenth century had yearned to murder their Jewish fellow-citizens.<sup>13</sup> When Hitler implemented an already widely endorsed "eliminationist anti-Semitism," the German masses endorsed it demonstratively. The notorious attack of anti-Semitism against Jewish

businesses and synagogues known as Kristallnacht, on November 9 and 10, 1938, according to Goldhagen, was a murderous rampage that attracted not only Nazi street gangs. Ordinary German citizens, who had been imbued with the German anti-Semitic culture allegedly joined in the violence. Significantly historians who made their reputations as critics of German nationalism like Hans Mommsen, Richard Evans, Ian Kershaw, and Fritz Stern, challenged the credibility of these charges. But among younger Germans raised in an antifascist, antinational culture, Goldhagen's perspective is popular.

Equally indicative of the antifascist mood in Germany since unification has been the elevation of the anniversary of the country's surrender in 1945 to a rigorously enforced day of celebration. This practice came from the former East German Communist regime, which declared May 8 to be a "day of liberation." Until 1966 the German Democratic Republic treated May 8 as a workers' holiday and even afterwards, when it became necessary to work on that day, held annual festivities on what is known as "*Befreiungstag*." Celebrating Germany's unconditional surrender as a "day of liberation" was turned into a litmus test for antifascist feelings. Never mind the fact that even into the recent past, such paradigmatic German leftists as Willy Brandt and Rudolf Augstein, then editor of Der Spiegel, ridiculed this proposal.

Among the numerous attacks against those who continue to view the anniversary of Germany's unconditional surrender as a source of sorrow, is an invective by Ignaz Bubis, the onetime director of the Central Committee for Jews in Germany. Opponents of this antifascist celebration, according to Bubis, are people living in the past, who wish to continue what happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945.<sup>14</sup> Although Bubis qualified this charge by describing his opponents as Nazi sympathizers who want a "perhaps more moderate version" of



Hitler's tyranny, his accusation has a now familiar tone. It resembles our own antifascist rhetoric, which equates insufficiently progressive views with nostalgia for the Third Reich.

Also exemplifying the attempts of German elites since unification to incorporate Eastern German Communist antifascism has been the showcasing of Communists in paying tributes to anti-Nazi resistance. Up until the 1990s the annual commemoration of the resistance movement centered on the July 20 ceremony, honoring the abortive attempt by among others the martyred Claus von Stauffenberg to assassinate Hitler and overthrow the Nazi government. Although the conspirators represented a wide range of views, extending from monarchists to social democrats, antifascist Germans, particularly academic and journalists, have balked at this commemoration and even demonstrated against it. Most of the conspirators against Hitler, it has been charged, were German nationalists of one sort or another, and even their social democratic allies were thought to hold views that were reactionary by current antifascist standards.

By 1995 the federal government agreed to include the Communist resistance to the Nazis as integral to the annual celebration. Two arguments were advanced for this change, most prominently by anti-nationalist historians Heinrich Winkler and Hans Mommsen.<sup>15</sup> One, the East German population would feel offended if Communist opponents to Hitler were not included in festivities and exhibits honoring the German Resistance. Two, the celebrations were taking place not to honor the German people but to pay tribute to wartime German antifascists. The first argument was largely specious, since there was no reason to believe that Germans who had suffered under Communist tyranny were yearning to celebrate Communist antifascists. But the second argument advanced by its proponents may carry more weight. For those who have tried to elevate antifascism to a German state religion, including Communist functionaries in the celebratory rituals made perfectly good sense.

Historian Rainer Zitelmann correctly observes that the attempt to draw Communists, including former Stasi informants in Brandenburg, into an antifascist front was a clever flanking movement by pro-Communist leftists.<sup>16</sup> After German unification lurid reports about Communist brutality began pouring in from the East. These revelations caused Germans to move back toward the once widespread template of the 1950s, when Germany stood in the front-line against totalitarian Communism. From that perspective Communism was the enemy of those who valued personal liberties. Like Nazism it was a form of totalitarianism, and that category encompassed both Communists and Nazis who threatened a liberal constitutional order: “In the place of anti-totalitarianism there now emerged a purer anti-fascism combined with fashionable anti-anti-Communism. As a result of this development any anti-Communist position was deemed to be reactionary or primitive.”

A missing observation in Zitelmann’s otherwise perceptive analysis is a major reason that German antifascists were and still are attracted to the now fallen German Communist dictatorship. It is not because they are orthodox Marxist-Leninists. These fans of the fallen Communist dictatorship viewed the East German state as an appropriate punishment for a nation they hope would disappear, through Third World immigration and/or absorption into an international body. Much of Germany’s intelligentsia opposed the reunification of Germany because they felt the Germans did not deserve to have a unified country, given their guilt for twentieth century wars and given the devastation that accompanied these conflicts.<sup>17</sup> Leaders of Germany’s Greens, like Jürgen Trittin and Claudia Roth, have expressed such opinions repeatedly; while the parents of Angela Merkel chose to live in Communist East Germany because they considered Communist oppression a fitting fate for their morally contaminated nation.<sup>18</sup>

Inherent in these attitudes is a post-Marxist form of antifascism. Those who embody and implement it are critical of traditional social relations and cultural values, and they made common cause with the Marxist Left to finish off a world that disgusts them. German reeducation has become a model for the reconstruction of other Western societies. Some of the measures that social psychologists and public administrators imposed on a defeated Germany in an earlier crusade against fascism have now been applied elsewhere. It is hardly accidental that this form of democracy makes citizens subject to a coordinated antifascist social experiment. In this program of socialization, the media, culture industry, public administration and state-controlled education all play pivotal roles. It is noteworthy that a remark by the Christian Democratic federal deputy, Friedrich Merz, to the effect that Muslim migrants as well as the German Right were spreading anti-Semitic sentiments, brought down the wrath of Merz's supposedly conservative party. His Christian Democratic colleagues rushed to remind the deputy that on the seventy-fifth anniversary of Auschwitz it was inexcusable that this political leader should be arousing "xenophobia" instead of focusing on the right-wing nationalist danger in Germany.

A more robust democracy and true constitutional freedoms, it is feared, might open the door to a renewal of fascism. Therefore self-government for the people must remain a guided process, until enlightened rulers can be sure their population has been immunized against fascist impulses. One might contrast this attitude to the hope expressed by Antonio Gramsci, the theoretical father of the Italian Communist Party, that the intelligentsia (*il ceto intellettuale*) would never distance themselves from the laboring masses. Intellectuals, according to Gramsci, could only justify their existence by serving as a vehicle for the material betterment of the proletariat.<sup>19</sup> But in Germany's reeducation model, which has now spread to other liberal

democracies, the working masses are viewed as the bearers of deep-seated fascist and authoritarian attitudes. It therefore behooves the intelligentsia in alliance with the state to keep the ignorant and impulsive from exercising their unguided will. The success of democracy depends on acting illiberally in the short and middle term to prevent a fascist recrudescence. An unredeemed false-democratic man became the target for, if necessary, forced conversion when the antifascist project arrived on these shores.

#### <A>Antifascism as Psychological Reconditioning

The Frankfurt School could look back on a history of eleven years in Germany before it migrated to New York City, by way of Geneva, in 1935. Soon after its relocation, the School was renamed as the Institute for Social Research and acquired a structural relationship to Columbia University. Later, as part of the process of Americanization, its German periodical, Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, was turned into a widely respected English-language journal Studies in Psychological and Social Science. There are two ways of understanding the Frankfurt School's evolution in the US, either as a prolonged exile existence occasioned by the Nazi takeover of Germany or as a fusion of a radical ideology (one that was radical by interwar German standards) with changing American fashions. Although much of the School's early work on the connection between fascism and sexual repression work was published in German, most of it would eventually become available in English. In 1950 the School was reestablished under American encouragement in Frankfurt as part of a new German university. Max Horkheimer returned to Germany to direct this operation, and then lured Theodor Adorno into helping him manage the restored German institute.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the School's return to its place of origin in 1950, Critical Theorists, who imaginatively blended Freudian and Marxist ideas, continued to exert a powerful influence on American political culture.<sup>21</sup> While the School was being reestablished in Germany, the American Jewish Committee brought out The Authoritarian Personality, as a gargantuan installment of its Studies in Prejudice series.<sup>22</sup> A project that had been in the works since 1944, when Horkheimer was asked to head it, this study would strongly influence social psychology and on other social sciences in the US. Horkheimer and his companions undertook a task of great importance for its participants as well as for those who managed to wade through its convoluted English prose. The contributors claimed to be demonstrating the deep-seated psychological problems that caused the "authoritarian personality" to bring forth the horrors of fascist tyranny.

Once the War was over, Critical Theorists Adorno and Marcuse believed the US far more than Germany had fallen prey to fascist temptations. In an oft-cited letter that Marcuse wrote to his longtime collaborator in February 1947, he explained that the world was now divided into two blocs, one led by an "imperfect" socialistic state and the other embracing the "neofascist" West under American leadership. According to Marcuse, the states in which the old ruling class survived the war politically and economically would soon become fascist. Further: "The neofascist and Soviet societies are economically and in terms of class structure enemies and a war between them is inevitable. Both, however, are in their forms of domination antirevolutionary and opposed to socialist development." In view of this dire situation Marcuse called for defining a revolutionary theory that would "resist both systems and represent orthodox Marxist teachings without compromise."<sup>23</sup>

Such thoughts raise persistent questions about whether the Critical Theorists ever represented orthodox Marxist teachings as opposed to Freudian-tinged cultural criticism. Every

major European Communist party together with Soviet party theorists had railed against this fusion since the 1920s. From an orthodox Marxist and certainly Marxist-Leninist perspective, the emphasis that Critical Theorists placed on erotic gratification, far more than economic transformation, and their identification of fascism with sexual dysfunctionality, was an idiosyncratic leftist position. European Communist regimes were understandably offended by this unsettling invention.

Equally interesting is another belief that Marcuse shared with Adorno, namely that if the Institute for Social Research could devise a proper revolutionary theory, it would change the nature of history, starting with the confrontation then taking place between the imperfectly socialist Soviet Union and neofascist America. Although such claims were undoubtedly exaggerated, they were not completely out of place. After all, the effect of the war waged by the Frankfurt School in exile against fascist, or fascist-like prejudice would be felt in the US during the Second World War. By then social psychologists and academic personnel who were steeped in Critical Theory were helping the government plan the reeducation of the Germans.<sup>24</sup>

Other forms of antifascism preceded, overlapped, and sometimes competed with the antifascist views propagated in the US by the Critical Theorists. In the interwar period there was concern expressed by journalists and academics about the appeal of the Italian and German models of government among certain sectors of American society. Concern was likewise raised about an American variety of fascism, one that might come wrapped in an American flag, which was seen as represented by the populist style and folksy message of the “Share the Wealth” governor of Louisiana, Huey Long (1928–1932).<sup>25</sup> Alarm would also be generated by an unusual critic of New Deal, Father Charles Edward Coughlin, who inveighed against Jews and

Wall Street on a weekly radio program from suburban Detroit.<sup>26</sup> Rightly or wrongly Coughlin for years became the face and voice of fascism in the US.

After the First World War, to the consternation of some, books began appearing, such as T. Lothrop Stoddard's The Rising Tide of Color (1920), which glorified the Aryan race.<sup>27</sup> Stoddard, a brilliant polemicist and New England blueblood, became by the 1930s an outspoken advocate for Nazi Germany and its eugenic planning. In reaction to what the author viewed as surging pro-fascist sentiment in the US, Sinclair Lewis published in 1935 his popular novel It Can't Happen Here, a 400-page journey into an American government takeover by fascist leaders.<sup>28</sup> Lewis's wife Dorothy Thompson, a prominent journalist of the time, was particularly unsettled by the spread of fascist thought. Like her husband, she believed this ideology was gaining momentum on this side of the Atlantic and warned against it in her columns.<sup>29</sup>

Another form of antifascism that clearly overlapped the spread of Cultural Marxism in the US and sometimes mingled with it was the identification of American industrial and military power with fascism. This is the subgenus of antifascism that I encountered as a graduate student at Yale in the 1960s, as an often turbulent opposition to the war in Vietnam erupted. Here fascism became synonymous with American military activity directed against Communist insurgencies and the extensions of Soviet control. Although those who made these arguments may not have been aware of its provenance, their critique of fascism was at the heart of Franz Neumann's investigation of Nazism, and it was reflected in some of the antifascist rhetoric of Neumann's close friend, Herbert Marcuse. A later statement of similar views could be found in Bertram Gross's Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America (1980), which emphatically associates fascism with an American military-industrial complex.<sup>30</sup> Although Gross looks at the ideological manipulation that he identifies with this Behemoth, he focuses mostly on

the structural and material preconditions of a fascist state. Gross also wrote critically about proliferating administration and the difficulties of gaining control of this managerialized modern state and economy.<sup>31</sup> His voluminous study of management recalls James Burnham's examination of the managerial revolution and the writings of a post-World War Two leftist analyst of American power relations, C. Wright Mills.

These competing or intermingling forms of antifascism in the US were not however the models that led to the present antifascist ideology, except in a very derivative way. The Frankfurt School and its disciples provide the bridge that brought us to the subject of this book and to the contemporary imperative for cultural and emotional transformation. This now triumphant antifascism reached its apogee long after the age of European fascism and Nazism. It is a reaction not to the spread of self-described fascist regimes but to the breakthrough of a Left that must be understood in terms of its own morality and mandate for power. After the Second World War, both the psychology profession and social theorists assigned prominence to emigre Critical Theorists and to those whom they trained. If Critical Theorists Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Eric Fromm, Karen Harney, and Ilse Frenkel could not change Russia's imperfect socialism, they nonetheless hoped to sell their market brand of antifascism to New World inhabitants. The Authoritarian Personality (TAP) unveils the "pseudo-democratic personality," which in Adorno's contribution is identified with Republican voters and those who express reservations about socialism. For the contributors those afflicted with dangerous emotional difficulties, a situation that they often attributed to overbearing fathers, tried to hide their disorder by appearing moderate and tolerant. It was therefore necessary for the specialist to probe deeper and discover what lay beneath the surface. The contributors also hastened to make certain connections that for them seemed self-evident. Being anti-Semitic, anti-socialist, and



expressing disagreement with FDR's New Deal were all considered highly indicative of the "authoritarian personality."<sup>32</sup>

Although this antifascist analysis would seem to clash with American patriotism, Christopher Lasch in The True and Only Heaven notes the wide appeal enjoyed by TAP in post-War America, and not entirely on the far Left.<sup>33</sup> As early as 1947 Adorno and his associates prepared the California F-scale Test in order to evaluate applicants for state employment in terms of their proneness to "fascist attitudes." What eventually became nation-wide F-scale testing for public employees was administered to, among others, candidates for police work and public-school students. This procedure was thought to be necessary for screening out or treating socially threatening personalities.<sup>34</sup> It has continued to be used in assessing personality measures for adolescents and job applicants throughout the US, and elements of F-scale testing have gone into psychology inventories in, among other states, California and Minnesota. In the 1980s Canadian professor of psychology Bob Altemeyer constructed a new model for F-scale testing that removed the fuzzy questions in the older form. This too was subsequently given to applicants for public employment.<sup>35</sup> All such testing had a palpable relation to those measures proposed in the final section of TAP for dealing with the fascist mindset in modern Western democracies.

Although such a project never won over the anti-New Deal Right, the work commissioned by the American Jewish Committee nonetheless attracted anti-Soviet progressives.<sup>36</sup> The American sponsors of the Critical Theorists, who established Commentary magazine in 1951, were staunch Truman Democrats and also quite anxious about anti-Jewish prejudice. A leading American sociologist and a paradigmatic Cold War liberal, S. M. Lipset, lavished praise on TAP but also felt its authors should have connected those psychic disorders they examined to Soviet Communism. Lipset, who published his relevant comments in American

Sociological Review in 1959, was particularly impressed by Adorno's investigation of so-called working class authoritarianism, a problem that Lipset was then engaging as well.<sup>37</sup>

An obvious connection between Lipset's politics and the Frankfurt School in exile, and one extensively discussed by Lasch, was a shared distrust for the working class. Ironically or problematically, this was the class the Left claimed to be serving. But Lipset and the authors of TAP were looking elsewhere for support. They looked to an administrative class that enlisted social scientists and which would address emotional disorders in the general population.<sup>38</sup> Naturally the Critical Theorists were interested in other goals, besides spreading their variation on Freudian depth psychology. They also hoped to reduce economic inequality while combatting the fascist personality and other evils of late capitalist repression. Significantly the far-Left politics espoused by Adorno and other contributors, who may have been less anti-Soviet than they were opposed to the Western alliance, eventually faded from mainstream interpretations. For a while this allowed their findings to fit into the struggle against an undemocratic Communism just as it had earlier provided ammunition against a fascist enemy.

Another development brought about by the Frankfurt School and its epigones was the theoretical and rhetorical fusion of fascism with "right-wing extremism." Although one can certainly find exemplifications of this extremism, like explicit neo-Nazis, the term "fascist" now refers to attitudes and movements that a progressive or woke critic scorns and wants to render unacceptable. This includes traditional Christians, critics of government centralization, gun owners, opponents of further Muslim immigration into Europe, and those who show insufficient enthusiasm for newly discovered human rights. Right-wing extremist meant for the Frankfurt School a susceptibility to or espousal of fascism, and therefore, labeling someone as an extremist of the Right implies that targeted individual may indeed be an undetected fascist.

This linkage may also be observed in how random admirers of Mussolini's regime have been sometimes thrown together with American nativists and anti-black racists. In a study of right-wing extremists and fascists in Pennsylvania between 1925 and 1950, religious historian Philip Jenkins includes both the Ku Klux Klan and Italian-Americans who felt pride in Mussolini's restoration of honor to their ancestral land.<sup>39</sup> The more extensively Jenkins explores his topic, the less likely it seems that all his subjects belong in the same ideological camp. It is not even clear that Mussolini's admirers in the US were all right-wing extremists, as opposed to Southern Italian immigrants living in South Philadelphia who were cheering something of significance back home in Italy.

#### <A>Penitential History: A Digression

Another aspect of reeducating the defeated Germans after World War Two that reached the US and much of the rest of the Western world was the use of historical studies to reconstruct national character. Contrary to the intentions of the Morgenthau Plan, Germany was not reduced permanently to a fragmented, deindustrialized country, nor was its economy totally socialized in the way that Franz Neumann and other Marxist advised the occupying powers to do. But the Germans, it was believed, could be pedagogically reconditioned through the creation of new faculties and new disciplines (e.g., political science). They would also be given meticulously revised textbooks, particularly those explaining the German past that would help turn them into good democrats.

Hessen was among the earliest and most dedicated of the Länder that carried out this educational project. By summer 1945 both the Socialists and Communists in Hessen gained the approval of the occupying powers as democratic parties, and local authorities began preparing

suitable textbooks that would wean younger Germans away from their nation's past. University faculty were also summoned, with the assistance of, among others, Critical Theorists, to push German higher education in a new direction. In the 1950s a younger associate of Adorno's re-established Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Jürgen Habermas was tasked with carrying out a survey of German students intended to indicate where they stood on the scale between democratization and exhibiting traits of the authoritarian personality. Although the initial study, which came out in 1957, was confined to 150 students (it was eventually expanded to 550), Habermas drew portentous conclusions from this limited sample. German students would require considerably more pedagogical instruction to be able to resist residual fascist influences.<sup>40</sup> In the decades that followed, Habermas became one of the West's most zealous critics of the German past and of any road that might lead back into Europe's ethnocentric or anti-cosmopolitan past.

An historical work that enjoyed acclaim for being fully consistent with efforts to overcome the German fascist past was Fritz Fischer's Griff nach der Weltmacht. Fischer's revisionist work appeared in 1961,<sup>41</sup> and immediately gained the approval of a mostly younger generation of postwar German journalists and academics. Fischer had been a dedicated Nazi during the Third Reich and after the War, had to undergo denazification. Fortunately for Fischer's career, he gave the impression of having undergone a change of heart.<sup>42</sup> As a professor at the University of Hamburg, where he had worked as an informer for the Third Reich, he championed German re-education and called for a definitive break from Germany's tainted past.

In the 1950s Fischer received invitations to attend conferences at Oxford, which centered on the need for a critical revision of his country's historiography. At the same time, he worked to establish friendly relations with the East German Communist government. Along with a gaggle of progressive German researchers, he gained access to archives in Potsdam that contained

historical records that had been captured by the Red Army in 1945. These records were subsequently handed over to the German Democratic Republic. Fischer's now famous work in which he contends that the German Imperial government launched the First World War to achieve world domination, depended on his special status as a researcher. He was granted permission to look at certain documents that less progressive historians, like his critic and a firm supporter of the government of Chancellor Adenauer, Gerhard Ritter, had been denied.

Fischer's magnum opus and the defenses it elicited from historians Immanuel Geiss, Wolfgang Mommsen, and Heinrich Winkler and most of the German media both reflected and accelerated changes in the larger German culture. Fischer's last book, which was predictably entitled Hitler Was No Operational Accident, echoed the antifascist tone of all his writing since the early 1960s.<sup>43</sup> In this work Fischer set out to demonstrate one last time the lines of continuity between the German Second Empire and Hitler's dictatorship. The vast panorama in his second book centering on the outbreak of the First World War as The War of Illusions, dwelled on the aggressive mindset of all German classes in 1914. It was also the mindset, we are reminded, that lay behind the catastrophe of 1933.<sup>44</sup> Fischer and his disciples left no stone unturned in driving home their steadily repeated pedagogical lessons.

It is easy to pick out the weaknesses that lie just beneath the surface of their depiction of Germany's role in World War One. Fischer decided not to notice the war aims pursued by other belligerents, which were at least as scandalous as those of the Germans.<sup>45</sup> He also failed to consider that the German Empire was indeed encircled by a hostile Franco-Russian alliance in 1914, that the Russians fully mobilized on Germany's and Austria's border before the Germans declared war on them,<sup>46</sup> and that rival nationalisms and entangling secret alliances more than inherent German aggressiveness may have brought about the war. Fischer and his disciples also

had a tendency to cite supposedly incriminating sources in a deliberately abbreviated fashion, e.g., a famous or infamous memorandum written by the German Chief of the General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke in December 1911, allegedly making clear that Germany would have to go to war, given the international situation. But the memorandum gives evidence that Moltke hoped the Germans and their Austrian allies would escape the pervasive belligerent mood of the time and not allow tensions to boil over into a European-wide war.<sup>47</sup>

Further, the so-called reactionary nationalist historians whom Fischer and the Fischerites claimed to be opposing did not really fit their description. A major target, Gerhard Ritter, strongly criticized the reliance of Imperial Germany on unworkable military solutions. Ritter scolded Erich Ludendorff and other German commanders for holding dangerously unrealistic views of Germany's power in 1914 or else for sinking back periodically into unwise fatalism.<sup>48</sup> But he also castigated the Fischerites for their reductionist accounts of the past. Ritter complained that his opponents were being driven not so much by a desire to understand the past as by a fixation to locate all the essential elements of Nazi tyranny in the German Second Empire. Long after Ritter's death, it is difficult to find any unabashed critic of Fischer's thesis who has been allowed to advance in the German or Austrian academic world.

Fischer's work does however offer a prototype of what is here characterized as penitential history. Its author claimed to have unearthed compelling new reasons that Germans were required to expiate their collective past. Stored in East German archives in the late 1950s, was a document containing the extensive war aims of German Chancellor Theobald Bethmann Hollweg. This document presented among Germany's desired war aims economic control over Eastern Europe and the Empire's incorporation of conquered territory in the West. These annexationist aims, which originated in September 9, 1914, were drawn up during the Battle of

the Marne and about six weeks after the beginning of the hostilities. A memorandum containing these aims was then sent from Koblenz, where the Chancellor was sojourning, to the German Minister of the Interior, Clemens von Delbrück in Berlin.

One need not assume like Fischer that Bethmann-Hollweg formulated his aims before the war started.<sup>49</sup> Nor are these aims any more disconcerting than those that were produced by the French and other Allied powers at about the same time. When confronted by the same document, East German Communist historians attributed these provisional war aims to a program of conquest devised by German finance capitalists. Although East German interpreters initially hailed Fischer's achievement, they also noted that he fell short of their expectations. He held back from examining World War One within a broad framework of rival capitalist elites competing on an international stage.<sup>50</sup> This was hardly surprising since Fischer and his circle were not really laboring to confirm any Marxist-Leninist interpretation. Rather they were seeking to profit from the imposition of a guilt trip on their countrymen. It would not be irrelevant to mention that much of Fischer's support came from antifascist historians in the US, like Fritz Stern at Columbia and Hajo Holborn at Yale, who extolled Fischer's mission in reminding his wayward nation of its collective culpability for causing two world wars.<sup>51</sup>

In Fischer's call for collective German penance, as explained by his disciple Wolfgang Mommsen, "he showed the complicity not only of German leadership but of all social classes in these annexationist aims."<sup>52</sup> Unlike the Marxist account, which examines the war aims within the context of an economic system, Fischer and the Fischerites purported to be revealing the true extent of shared German guilt for the crimes of the twentieth century. A celebration in Der Spiegel of the fortieth anniversary of Fischer's magnum opus extols Fischer for exposing a lifetime lie, by proving indisputably that the Germans are guilty for the First World War. Not

surprisingly, Der Spiegel had been saying the same thing for the preceding forty years, during which time it attributed competing views to right-wing German nationalists.<sup>53</sup>

Because of their uniformly evil past, according to the Fischerites, Germans had to accept (until the fall of the Berlin Wall changed this) the permanent division of their country. To become reconciled to this deserved loss, Germans were urged to read Griff nach der Weltmacht, presumably with the proper instruction. Fischer's disciple Immanuel Geiss related his teacher's historical narratives to its intended political goals. If Germans were taught "that Germany must bear most of the guilt for the First World War, that this war in the case of the Germans was not a defensive struggle, and that the ruling classes launched this war in order to obtain new markets and raw materials [in Eastern Europe]," then they would recognize Poland's Western border and renounce any right to a reunified Germany.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, the word "definitive" (in German *maßgeblich*) crops up each time the Fischerites defend their teacher's thought.<sup>55</sup> For them history is not a contentious discipline but a form of moral and social therapy, which must be applied for its salvific effect. Fischer's disciple Helmut Lindemann underscores in now familiar terms the purpose of Griff nach der Weltmacht. The book was produced "out of patriotic concern, as an invitation to Germans to revise their history, to confess their guilt and to draw the necessary consequences after Fischer has proved the illusions of grandeur that once possessed the German people." According to Lindemann "one may criticize or question certain aspects of Fischer's work. That however does not lessen its eminent political value to which great weight must be assigned for setting right and enlightening our political consciousness..."<sup>56</sup> Here too the emphasis is placed on reading accounts of the past that will make the reader more willing to feel collective guilt and engage in collective political



atonement. Such accounts are definitive because any attempt to challenge them betokens a deficient moral consciousness.<sup>57</sup>

The approach to the historical past herein described is often presented as “revisionism,” but this characterization only applies if the intended revision is understood in the proper sense. Its advocates are not joining a discussion that is open to scholars with diverse judgments about a specific area of investigation. Nor are these revisionists engaging in what nineteenth-century German historians who defined their discipline, regarded as “Wissenschaft,” that is, a methodical study of relevant documents yielding tentative conclusions about the past. This is not the interpretive approach that penitential historians have in mind. Their approach is to be distinguished from investigations of data that do not offer the intended moral uplift. Further, it is no longer allowable under the new dispensation to believe that the study of the past, properly understood, should lead to an open-ended discussion among researchers. As Herbert Butterfield who defended that view of the historian’s discipline made clear, historians in practice did not always consistently meet the high standard being set but they were expected to aim at it.<sup>58</sup>

We are also not speaking here about a conventional historicist approach, which is perhaps best represented by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Such a historically minded approach recognizes that there are personal and time-dependent circumstances in which an historical work is created. Engaging in the discipline of history necessarily entails prejudice and time-centeredness. This, according to Gadamer, may create a problem as well as an incentive for the researcher. What pushes us toward our project may also distort our judgment; and therefore, we must be on guard against even while profiting from those personal reactions that have driven us toward our object of research.<sup>59</sup>

The present revisionism, however, seeks a different end, namely teaching us to deplore the reactionary forces and collective injustices of an earlier era. Those who render politically unacceptable judgments about historical works that perform this function are typically accused of working against an enlightened political consciousness. Only ecstatic approval seems to be the appropriate response to such didactic writings. Let us look for example at how the American journalistic and academic world greeted Eric Foner's Reconstruction: An Unfinished Revolution, 1865–1877. When this revisionist work on the post-Civil War Reconstruction was published in 1988, critical assessments or even measured praise seemed unsuitable. Compliments were heaped on Foner's penitential writing in the national press as a "heroic synthesis"<sup>60</sup> and he was called the preeminent historian of Reconstruction.<sup>61</sup>

Foner's work is presented as having superseded earlier studies on Reconstruction, most importantly, the two-volume work by W. A. Dunning which appeared in 1907. Although Dunning came from an anti-slavery Republican background, Foner and his votaries condemn him for not having gone far enough in defending the Reconstruction government. Dunning noticed that most Southern whites had been excluded from political power while a military occupation took place in the post-Civil War South. It is suggested that Dunning focused too heavily on this fact and on Republican corruption during the occupation.

Foner states his purpose quite straightforwardly in the preface to his book. His publication "required, however, not simply the evolution of scholarship but a profound change in the nation's politics and racial attitudes to deal the final blow to the Dunning school. If the traditional interpretation reflected and helped to legitimize the racial order of a society in which blacks were disenfranchised and subjected to discrimination in every aspect of their lives, Reconstruction revisionism bore the mark of the modern civil rights movement."<sup>62</sup> Not

surprisingly, this moralist has also labored to update those narratives that are available at Civil War battle sites. In line with his commitment, Foner has promoted our “Second Reconstruction,” by calling for the removal of statues and memorial plaques celebrating the Confederate commander Robert E. Lee.<sup>63</sup>

In an incident that should have caused more scandal than it did, two shots were fired across the bow by the widely respected historian Eugene D. Genovese against his erstwhile fellow Marxist revolutionary. These attacks were published in the social democratic publication Dissent, and called attention to Foner’s indifference to Communist mass murder and his deliberate use of the Organization of American Historians to pursue various political objectives that had nothing to do with scholarship.<sup>64</sup> However, Foner’s work has engendered mostly panegyrics.

A far more striking case of historiography being used to arouse guilt and a call for collective penance is Howard Zinn’s A People’s History of the United States. Although Zinn rarely describes what he portrays as “fascist,” he misses few opportunities to rage against the wickedness of the American past, starting with Columbus’s genocidal campaigns against the Arawak Amerindians and the rape of the New World through the establishment of slavery and racism down to America’s wars of aggression against anticolonial countries. In a revealing monograph, Mary Grabar, points out the numerous factual errors and plagiarisms that mar Zinn’s popular history.<sup>65</sup> Grabar notes that Zinn garnered multiple awards during his lifetime and even posthumously as a result of his one renowned book. And she quotes historian Eugene Genovese who remarked on Zinn’s success in how he moved from being an old-fashioned Brooklyn Jewish Communist to a “rock star” of the New Left by the 1960s.<sup>66</sup> Zinn, who died at the age of eighty-

seven in 2010, also lived long enough to become a hero of the multicultural Left, as shown by his continued popularity among the current generation of progressives.

What may distinguish his *livre de succès* from some of the other examples of penitential historiography mentioned in this section, is its simplistic, sermonic style. Zinn's work reads like a stump speech given by a member of the Democratic Left, and as Grabar proves, his scholarship has elicited negative evaluations even from those who like Eric Foner share his eagerness to write history from the bottom up but who are shocked by his bloopers and unproven generalizations.<sup>67</sup> One may be scraping the bottom of the barrel to cite Zinn's penitential history as an illustration of what this section is dealing with. Perhaps most strikingly, according to Grabar, Zinn imagines that the US is committing genocidal acts on a regular basis. "One reason these atrocities are still with us," as Zinn explains in A People's History, "is that we have learned to bury them in a mass of other facts, as radioactive wastes are buried in containers in the earth."<sup>68</sup> Perhaps the most astonishing part of this statement is Zinn's implied boast that no one would be writing about America's sins if he weren't doing this himself. A veritable industry now exists to perform this task.

A perhaps more respectable form of guilt-tripping in historical writing can be found in Spanish historiography since the end of the Franco regime. Books on Spain's fascist legacy come out almost daily, while monuments erected by the Franco regime are torn down and while school text are rewritten to glorify the antifascist side in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>69</sup> Pio Moa in Spain and Stanley Payne in the US have both written extensively about the exaggerations and distortions to which this rewriting of history has led.<sup>70</sup> A noteworthy aspect of anti-Franco, and more generally antifascist Spanish, revisionism has been the attempt to portray Moorish Spain (Al Andalus) as an oasis of tolerance surrounded by Spanish Catholic bigotry. Spanish Arab linguist Serafin

Fanjul has produced two massive volumes since 2000 that examine the variations on this ideologically driven myth.<sup>71</sup> Looking at the views of medieval Spain that are found in the works of such fashionable authors as Juan Goytisolo,<sup>72</sup> Americo Castro, and Claudio Sanchez Albornoz, Fanjul dissects their pro-Muslim, anti-Spanish Catholic positions.

Since Fanjul is an avowed freethinker who made a reputation as a translator of Arabic texts, it is hard to depict him plausibly as a Spanish Catholic zealot. In his book he distinguishes innocent exaggerations, e.g., overstating the Arab influence on the Spanish language and Spanish architecture or resurrecting the nineteenth-century romantic images of Al Andalus in Spanish literature, from the more tendentious and more deliberate misinterpretations of the Spanish past. Among the latter are accounts that overstate Catholic sins while sweeping under the rug the brutal treatment inflicted on Christians and Jews under Muslim rule in medieval Spain. Fanjul likewise notes as examples of what the anti-Catholic historians typically omit the crushing of non-Muslim communities under Almohade rulers in the eleventh century and the periodic outbursts of violence against religious minorities during the Kingdom of Grenada from 1238 until 1492.

Equally misleading, according to Fanjul, is the presentation of Muslims and Jews as two of the three nations that helped produce a Spanish people. Religious affiliation was once a necessary aspect of Spanish identity, and neither the Jews nor the Muslims, both of whom had their own qualifications for group membership, met that requirement.<sup>73</sup> According to Fanjul, there is also no compelling evidence to believe that Spain crumbled economically or politically because it expelled Jews in 1492 and then, converted Moors in 1609, after a series of revolts by these former Muslims. Unlike the Jews, who enjoyed wealth and, in some cases, high social position, the Muslims who remained after the consolidation of Catholic Spain in 1492 were rural

and poor. But there is also no indication that however unfortunate and unjust the expulsion of the Spanish Jews had been, the country thereafter fell apart. The Spanish government made other more disastrous mistakes, such as colonial overexpansion and wasteful spending, that led to the country's decline as a great power.<sup>74</sup>

According to Fanjul, the writings criticized represent resistance to the integral Spanish nationalism of the Franco era and the growing presence of Muslim immigrants in today's multicultural Spain. Most easily forgotten, notes Fanjul, is the inconvenient fact that the Muslim conquest of Spain in 711 brought about an "orgy of bloodshed" against the Latin and Visigothic inhabitants, one that lasted well into the 750s. Older residents who did not convert to Islam (*muladis*) were often callously massacred, unless they fled north to Asturias, where the Christians managed to hold on to territory.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the attacks on the Reconquista from the antifascist Left, according to Fanjul and Stanley Payne,<sup>76</sup> are designed to shatter the centerpiece of traditional Spanish identity. Although those who pursue this work might claim they are pursuing other aims, it is hard not to notice their single-minded dedication to destroying the pride once felt by Spaniards in their Catholic national past.

Yet another relevant example of penitential history concerns the picture of fascist Italy as the inescapable endpoint of a wicked, corrupt national history. The most famous and perhaps most prolific historian stressing that view is the late Englishman Denis Mack Smith. Since his first book Cavour and Garibaldi 1860 (1954) Mack Smith has treated Italian unification with conspicuous disfavor. Characteristic of his long list of books, including a biography of Mussolini, are attacks on Italy's reactionary parliamentary government that supposedly led to a later dictatorship. Members of Mack Smith's rogues gallery are Italy's founding father Count Camillo di Cavour and the monarch whom he served, Victor Immanuel, the ruler of Piedmont-

Savoy who later became king of Italy. Mack Smith also goes after such Italian parliamentary leaders from Italian unification on as D'Agostino Depretis, Francesco Crispi, and Giovanni Giolitti.<sup>77</sup> In contrast to Mack Smith's teacher George M. Trevelyan, with whom he studied at Oxford, and who viewed Italian unification as a nineteenth-century liberal achievement, Trevelyan's former student raged at how an Italian nation state came about. According to Italian historian Guido Pescosolido, "Mack Smith turned the older discourse about Italian national unification into its negative opposite. Not only did he trace the causes for the emergence of fascism back to the birth of a unitary Italian state. He also delineated a history of the Risorgimento [the movement in the nineteenth century leading toward Italian national unification] and the liberal state which is devoid in its fundamental components of any positive aspect."<sup>78</sup>

Pescosolido distinguished Mack Smith from other Italian thinkers whom the Englishman intermittently praised, particularly the liberal Italian patriot and neo-Hegelian philosopher Croce. Although Croce once befriended Mack Smith, he would have distanced himself from the decidedly anti-national direction in which the younger writer took his work.<sup>79</sup> According to the New York Review of Books, Mack Smith was not really like Gramsci, a Marxist, rather he was some kind of liberal. Another historian who has vigorously commented on the roots of fascism, Jonathan Steinberg, argues that Mack Smith's major accomplishment was telling historians what they did not want to hear.<sup>80</sup> Few historians of Italy have been more lionized than Mack Smith. Indeed his counterattacks on Rosario Romeo, Renzo di Felice and other historians who have pointed out his "*strafalcioni*" (gross mistakes) accentuate jealousy as the reason for this lack of appreciation. Mack Smith, as he himself has noted, is more widely read than his rivals, even in Italian translation. Unlike Romeo's three-volume biography of Cavour,<sup>81</sup> which is densely

documented, his own books sell briskly. Also, unlike these other historians, Mack Smith has been honored for supposedly daring to expose the roots of fascism. High-brow publications in the US have complimented him for besting Felice when the two sparred over the origins and character of Italian fascism. In this debate Mack Smith accused Felice of trying to minimize the criminal nature of fascism, an evil that Mack Smith has worked tirelessly to expose, to the applause of other progressive historians.<sup>82</sup>

No one is categorically denying any merit to the authors under consideration. In all these illustrative cases we are discussing studies in history that cover many hundreds of pages, and the books of Denis Mack Smith could fill entire library shelves with highly stimulating reading. Whereas Fischer had a strikingly clunky style and Foner writes with craftsman-like efficiency, Denis Mack Smith exhibits a literary brilliance that one might feel egalitarian envy on encountering. But our interest here is something other than how these representative authors express themselves. More relevant for this study is the glowing description of them as truth-tellers. Even when they engage in questionable generalizations, very few with influence in their field will call them to account.

The next chapter will look at current calls to arms against a re-emerging fascist danger. Here too antifascists evoke past confrontations between fascism and antifascism as they work to insert present engagements into a meaningful past. But the onetime established conventions of historical scholarship, e.g., the use of footnotes and the documentation of problematic statements, have become propagandistically less relevant as the fight against fascism gains in intensity.<sup>83</sup> We are therefore encountering what are mostly antifascist polemics instead of the older forms of penitential historiography presented in a traditional scholarly guise. Zinn's dwelling on America's burden of historical guilt may foreshadow this new model of antifascist



writing. It is a style of discourse that is more inflammatory and more sententious than most of the works discussed in this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Neiman, Learning from the Germans: Race and the Meaning of Evil ( New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2019); <https://www.salon.com/2019/09/24/philosopher-susan-neiman-says-trump-is-evil-and-she-literally-wrote-the-book/>.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/13/susan-neiman-interview-learning-from-the-germans>.

<sup>3</sup> See James Bacque, An Investigation into the Mass Deaths of German Prisoners at the Hands of the French and Americans after World War Two (Toronto: Stoddart, 1989) and by the same author Crimes and Mercies: The Fate of German Civilians under the Allied Occupation 1944 to 1950 reprint, (Talon Books, 2007) and Giles Mac Donogh, after the Reich: The Brutal History of the Allied Occupation, reprint (New York Basic Books, 2009). Books like these are controversial, although perhaps less so for their facts than for what they investigate.

<sup>4</sup> Two useful studies on the collapse of Germany are Adam Tooze, Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy (New York: Viking, Penguin, 2008); and Ian Kershaw, The Defense and Destruction of Nazi Germany, 1944-1945 (New York: Viking/Penguin, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> See Alfred Maurice de Zayas, Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, expanded edition (New York: St. Martin's, 2006); and R.M. Douglas, Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

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<sup>6</sup> A carefully weighed critique of the trials came from longtime editor of Yale Review Eugene Davidson in The Nuremberg Fallacy, new edition (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2223383/Churchill-opposed-Nuremberg-wanted-Nazi-leaders-executed-jailed-trial.html>.

<sup>8</sup> A useful overview of the events leading into the Cold War is in A.J. Levine, The Soviet Union, the Communist Movement, and the World Prelude to the Cold War (New York: Praeger, 1992); and René Rémond, Le XXe siècle de 1914 `a nos jours, revised edition (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 158-88.

<sup>9</sup> Two relevant, recent studies of Soviet behavior at the end of the Second World War and at the beginning of the Cold War are Norman M. Naimark, The Russians in Germany: A History of the Russian Zone, 1945-1946 (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Robert Gellately, Stalins's Curse: Battling for Communism in World War and Cold War (New York: Viking, 2012). Perhaps the definitive English-language study of this subject is Hugh Seton-Watson, Neither War nor Peace: The Struggle for Power in the Postwar World, paperback (London: Kessinger, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> For the observations of a famous writer exposed to this process, se Ernst von Salomon, Der Fragebogen, paperback (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1961).

<sup>11</sup> A gold mine of information about the changing treatment of Germany at the hands of the occupying powers and the phased re-education of the defeated enemy is available in Caspar von Schrenk-Notzing, Charakterwäsche: Die Politik der amerikanischen Umerziehung in Deutschland (Munich: Kristall bei Langen-Müller, 1981).

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- <sup>12</sup> Harvard professor of philosophy W.E. Hocking, Experiment in Education: What We Can Learn from Educating Germans, paperback (Palala Books, 2018) produced an early critical study of German reeducation.
- <sup>13</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (New York: Viking, 1997); and the minute refutation of this work by Norman Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina, A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth (New York: Holt, 1998).
- <sup>14</sup> [https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/8-mai-1945-gefaehrlich-und-unzulaessig\\_aid\\_151504.html](https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/8-mai-1945-gefaehrlich-und-unzulaessig_aid_151504.html); <http://www.taz.de/!1513040/>.
- <sup>15</sup> See for example Hans Mommsen's comments in the Frankfurter Rundschau (July 14, 1994).
- <sup>16</sup> See Rainer Zitelmann, "Vom antitotalitären zum antifaschistischen Geschichtsbild," Wiederkehr von dem Sozialismus (Berlin: Ulstein, 1996), 230-55. For a restatement of most of the same arguments by a recently deceased scholar, see Jost Bauch, Abschied von Deutschland: Eine politische Grabschrift (Rothenburg: Kopp, 2018).
- <sup>17</sup> See the expressions of anti-national sentiment in Jungle World, a website publication close to the German Greens and the Party of Democratic Socialists, October 29, 2009, <http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2009/44/39686.html>; and the Kampf gegen Rechts site <http://www.kampf-gegen-rechts.de/>.
- <sup>18</sup> A work that explores Merkel's upbringing and early career in East Germany with remarkable thoroughness is Das Erste Leben der Angela Merkel by Ralf Georg Reuth and Günter Lachmann (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2013).
- <sup>19</sup> Antonio Gramsci, Quaderni del Carcere (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), especially 36-40. Gramsci was concerned that his country's "intellectuals" might separate themselves from the revolutionary

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working class or exhibit a Jacobin temperament that had no serious political content.” Ibid, 54. He also affirmed the necessity of creating an “organic relation” between the intelligentsia and the class that it hoped to guide.

<sup>20</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of the evolution of the Frankfurt School in the US, see Martin Jay’s Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

<sup>21</sup> Critical Theory continued to thrive in the US, despite the decline of interest in Freudian psychotherapy, a practice that Fromm, Harney, and other “Freudian Marxists” pursued after the Second World War. On the vicissitudes of American Freudianism, see J. Burnham, After Freud Left: A century of Psychoanalysis in America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); for a fascinating study of post-War countercurrents, see Paul M. Dennis, “Bishop Fulton Sheen: America’s Public Critic of Psychoanalysis,” Journal of the History of Behavioral Sciences (2019), 1-15.

<sup>22</sup> See Theodor Adorno et al., The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper, 1950) and Rolf Wiggershaus, Theodor W. Adorno (Munich: Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1987), 71-79.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Rolf Wiggershaus, Die Frankfurter Schule, sixth edition (Munich and Vienna: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 2001), 432.

<sup>24</sup> See Die Frankfurter Schule, 430-38.

<sup>25</sup> The definitive, exhaustive biography of this flamboyant figure is T. Harry Williams, Huey Long (New York: Viking Books, 1981)

<sup>26</sup> See Sheldon Marcus, Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1973) for an admirably balanced account of the life of this controversial radio priest. Especially after 1940, when Coughlin was forced by his clerical

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superiors to give up his radio program, his published writings became increasingly bland. To the surprise of some, he ended up as a JFK-Democrat.

<sup>27</sup> See T. Lothrop Stoddard, The Rising Tide of Color: Against White World Supremacy, paperback (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003); and Pat Shipman, The Evolution of Racism (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

<sup>28</sup> See Sinclair Lewis, It Can't Happen Here, paperback (NAL Trade, 2003)

<sup>29</sup> <https://lithub.com/a-good-journalist-understands-that-fascism-can-happen-anywhere-anytime/>

<sup>30</sup> Bertram Myron Gross, Friendly Fascism: The New Face of Power in America (Boston: South End Press, 1980)

<sup>31</sup> Bertram Myron Gross, The Managing of Organizations: The Administrative Struggle, in two volumes (New York: Free Press, 1964)

<sup>32</sup> The Authoritarian Personality, 891-960.

<sup>33</sup> Christopher Lasch, The True and Only Heaven (New York: Norton, 1991), 457-61.

<sup>34</sup> For an attempt to fit F-Scale testing into a broader American cultural context, see Angelo M. Codevilla, "America's Ruling Class and the Perils of Revolution," American Spectator (August 2010).

<sup>35</sup> See Bob Altemeyer, Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Winnipeg: University of Winnipeg Press, 1981); and by the same author, The Authoritarian Specter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996)

<sup>36</sup> Two relevant critiques of the TAP and its influence on American culture and political practices are in William F. Buckley's Up from Liberalism, (New York: McDowell and Obolensky, 1959), 59-62; and the excellent anthology, Studies in the Scope and Method of the

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Authoritarian Personality, editors Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1954).

<sup>37</sup> See Lipset's observations about "Working Class Authoritarianism" in American Sociological Review 24. (1959), 482-501.

<sup>38</sup> See Christopher Lasch, The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics (New York: Norton, 1991), 460-61.

<sup>39</sup> Philip Jenkins, Hoods and Shirts: The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania 1925-1950 (Chapel Hill, N.C. : University of North Carolina Press, 1997)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 606-28.

<sup>41</sup> The current English edition is Fritz Fischer's Germany's War Aims (New York: Norton, 1967).

<sup>42</sup> See Hermann-Josef Grosse Kracht, "Fritz Fischer und der deutsche Protestantismus," Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologie-Geschichte, 10/2 (2003), 196-223.

<sup>43</sup> Fritz Fischer, Hitler war kein Betriebsunfall (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> See the most recent English edition for this work War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914, trans. Marian Jackson (New York: Norton, 1973).

<sup>45</sup> See Georges Henri Soutou, La grande illusion: Comment la France a perdu la paix 1914-1920 (Paris: Tallandier, 2015); und Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau, "Von den Kriegsursachen zur Kriegskultur: Neuere Forschungstendenzen zum ersten Weltkrieg in Frankreich," Neue Politische Literatur (1994), 201-04; and <http://www.independent.org/publications/tir/article.asp?id=1332>.

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- <sup>46</sup> On Franco-Russian complicity, see for example Friedrich Stieve, Iswolski und der Weltkrieg (Berlin: Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1924) and Sean McKeekin, The Russian Origins of the First World War.
- <sup>47</sup> For a remarkably cogent and thorough summing up of all the major criticisms of the Fischer thesis, see Gunter Spraul, Der Fischer Komplex (Halle: Cornelius, 2011), 254-388.
- <sup>48</sup> See Gerhard Ritter's three volume work, which particularly in the final volume offers an alternative to the Fischer thesis about Germany's road to war in 1914, The Sword and the Scepter (Miami: University of Miami Press, 1972); and Ritter's early critical response to Fischer's work "Eine neue Kriegsschuldthese," Historische Zeitschrift 194 (1962), 657-668. Less viscerally expressed responses to Fischer's key points are found in Egmont Zechlin's anthology, Krieg und Kriegsrisiko: zur deutschen Politik im Ersten Weltkrieg (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979); Konrad Jarausch, "Revisiting German History: Bethmann Hollweg Revisited," Central European History 21.3 (September, 1988), 224-43; and Edwin Hölzle, "Das Experiment des Friedens im Ersten Weltkrieg, 1914-1917," Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht, 8 (1962), 514.
- <sup>49</sup> German historian Egmont Zechlin first advanced this counterargument in "Juli 1914: Antwort auf eine Streitschrift," Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht (4/1983), 244-246; and Dietrich Erdmann, "Zur Beurteilung Bethmann Hollwegs," ibid 15 (1964), 525-40.
- <sup>50</sup> See Der Fischer Komplex, 148-82.
- <sup>51</sup> See Hajo Holborn's introduction to Germany's Aims in the First World War (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968); and Fritz Stern, The politics of illiberalism: essays on the Political Culture of Modern Germany (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992)

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- <sup>52</sup> For Wolfgang Mommsen's praise of Fischer for stressing the responsibility of all German social classes for the aggressive nationalism that led to war in 1914, see Die deutsche Kriegszielpolitik: Zum Stand der der Diskussion der Diskussion (Munich: Nymphenburg Verlagshandlung, 1970), 61-100.
- <sup>53</sup> See Der Spiegel, March 29, 2004, 134; and Der Fischer Komplex, 98-100.
- der Diskussion (Munich: Nymphenburgverlag, 1971), 60-101.
- <sup>54</sup> Quoted in Der Fischer Komplex, 110-12. For the original source, see Immanuel Geiss, Der polnische Grenzstreifen 1914-1918 (Dresden: Matthiesen, 1960), foreword.
- <sup>55</sup> [https://www.zeit.de/1999/50/199950.f.fischer\\_.xml](https://www.zeit.de/1999/50/199950.f.fischer_.xml)
- <sup>56</sup> Helmut Lindemann, "Monument deutscher Maßlosigkeit," in Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte (13) 5/1962.
- <sup>57</sup> On the efforts to make the Fischer-thesis the standard view of Imperial Germany among school students, see Rüdiger Bergien's "Fritz Fischers Thesen in Schulbüchern," Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift 64 (2005), 133-45.
- <sup>58</sup> See Herbert Butterfield Origins of History (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Kenneth McIntyre, History, Providence, and Skeptical History (Wilmington Delaware: ISI, 2011); Geoffrey Elton, "Herbert Butterfield and the Study of History," The Historical Journal 23.7 (September 1984), 729-43.
- <sup>59</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, ed. Günter Figal, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007), especially 1-8, 219-36.
- <sup>60</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1988/05/15/when-the-cruel-war-was-over/0730449c-f1f5-48bc-887b-8fc364a16888/?utm\\_term=.bc0061039305](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1988/05/15/when-the-cruel-war-was-over/0730449c-f1f5-48bc-887b-8fc364a16888/?utm_term=.bc0061039305).



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- <sup>61</sup> . <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/05/22/books/a-moment-of-terrifying-pr.omise.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=BA3149157DB77FF2E92D2B7CBDB97EEB&gwt=pay>.
- <sup>62</sup> Eric Foner, Reconstruction in America: The Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877 (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), xxi-xxii.
- <sup>63</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/28/books/review/eric-foner-robert-e-lee.html>. A particularly bizarre restatement of Foner's depiction of Reconstruction can be found in the establishment conservative publication The Claremont Review XVII 2 (Spring 2017) 74-81, which celebrates the humiliation of the white South in the Civil War as the removal of a malignant growth on a Northern democratic society. The historian Allen C. Guelzo pours unqualified praise on Reconstruction, which "was a bourgeois revolution that was crushed by the resurgent political power of a bloodied but unbowed aristocracy." Cf. page 80.
- <sup>64</sup> Dissent 41 (Summer, 1994), 371-76, 386-88.
- <sup>65</sup> Mary Grabar, Debunking Howard Zinn: Exposing the Fake History That Turned a Generation against America (Washington, D.C. : Regnery History, 2019). Southern historian Brion McClanahan observes in his critical essay "Reconstruction," in Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture (44.2, February 2020) that what principally distinguishes Guelzo and Foner from Dunning is their emphasis on racial oppression. The focus of Reconstruction studies has shifted not toward the Marxist Left but rather toward intersectionality. For a similar point of view, see Robert L. Paquette, "The Unemancipated Country: Eugene Genovese's Discovery of the Old South," Academic Questions (27.2, 2014), 204-12.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid 31.
- <sup>67</sup> Eric Foner, "Majority Report," New York Times, March 2, 1980, BR3.

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<sup>68</sup> Howard Zinn, A People's History of the United States, reissue (New York: Harper Perennial, 2015), 9.

<sup>69</sup> The Partido Vox in Spain has pushed back hard against all these tendencies. See for examples the remarks of Jose Contreras, the party's ideological leader:  
<https://www.actuall.com/criterio/democracia/hacia-una-fusion-de-vox-y-pp/>.

<sup>70</sup> See Stanley Payne, "Recent Historiography on the Spanish Republic and Civil War," Journal of Modern History 60/3 (September 1988), 540-56; and Arnaud Imatz's interview with Moa, "L'historien de la Guerre d'Espagne qui fait scandale," Nouvelle Revue Historique 17(March/April, 2005), 27-29.

<sup>71</sup> See Serafin, Fanjul, Andalus contra España: La forja del mito (Madrid: Siglo XI, 2000) and Andalus: Un imagen en la Historia (Madrid: Royal Academy of History, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> See Serafin, Fanjul, Andalus contra España: La forja del mito (Madrid: Siglo XI, 2000) and Andalus: Un imagen en la Historia (Madrid: Royal Academy of History, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> The author used the French edition of this book, which was the one that was available to him. See Al-Andalus: L'invention d'un mythe, trans. Nicholas Klein and Laura Martinez (Paris: L'Artilleur, 2017).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid 463-512.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid 32-33.

<sup>76</sup> Stanley Payne's last monumental work on Spanish history, Spain: A Unique History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011) addresses the question of what determines Spanish national identity and why Al Andalus is peripheral to shaping it.

<sup>77</sup> Among Mack Smith's more noteworthy books are Cavour and Garibaldi, 1860 (Cambridge University Press, 1954); Mussolini (New York: Knopf, 1982); Modern Italy, A Political

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History, revised edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); and Italy and its Monarchy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>78</sup> [http://www.storiamediterranea.it/public/md1\\_dir/r1490.pdf](http://www.storiamediterranea.it/public/md1_dir/r1490.pdf). Similar statements can be found in the work of an Italian Communist historian Paolo Altari, Studi storici, 2 (1959-60).

<sup>79</sup> One may find broad hints of how far to the left Mack Smith moved from his early patron in “Benedetto Croce: History and Politics,” Journal of Contemporary History (January 1973), 8.1, 41-61.

<sup>80</sup> <http://www.history.upenn.edu/people/emeritus/jonathan-steinberg> Steinberg’s praise appeared in The Guardian’s obituary for Smith on July 24, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jul/24/denis-mack-smith-obituary>. A similar obituary, celebrating Mack Smith’s courageous independence of mind appeared in the New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/books/denis-mack-smith-dead-historian-of-italy.html>.

<sup>81</sup> See Rosario Romeo, Cavour, il suo tempo, in three volumes (Bari: Laterza, 1990). Although it may seem to American reviewers that Mack Smith was more willing than Romeo to acknowledge regional economic disparities in the creation of the modern Italian state, it was Romeo, a Sicilian, who wrote the authoritative work on this problem, Mezzogiorno e Sicilia nel Risorgimento (Naples: ESI, 1963).

<sup>82</sup> Mack Smith’s legendary wars with Romeo and Felice are recounted in the obituary for him that appeared in Modern Italy, (2017) 22.3, 231-32. For Mack Smith’s more measured review of Felice’s massive work, see ibid., (2000) 5.2, 193-210.

<sup>83</sup> Typical of this form of historical remembrance that dispenses with the paraphernalia of technical scholarship is the 1619 Project advanced by the New York Times in August 2019.

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This Project is a penitential exercise but not explicitly antifascist.

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html?mtrref=www.bing.com&gwh=F70AAAED77E2DE5690AC395D1FE62F47&gwt=pay&assetType=REGIWALL>.

## Chapter Four: Defining and Redefining Fascism

Frank Böckelmann, a onetime Marxist theorist, has expressed both shock and wonder at how his German countrymen obsess over Nazi dangers, with ever more intensity the further away from the twelve years of Hitler's rule they move. Every church, school, academic conference, and book fair in Germany now routinely rails against fascism and Nazism. Meanwhile the German government has poured many hundreds of millions of dollars into various enterprises intended to "fight fascism." A gathering of German historians at Munster in 2018 devoted themselves to finding new ways to combat a supposedly ubiquitous Right. When contemporary historian Axel Schildt delivered a speech at the conference calling for the banning of certain words that might encourage fascist attitudes, for example, words containing the noun "Volk," the audience went wild applauding. At the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2018, a leader of *Aufstehen gegen Rassismus* (Stand Up against Racism) demanded that the government take vigorous action against the *Alternative für Deutschland*, Germany's right-of-center party, which the speaker described as "the parliamentary arm of Nazism." The assembled crowd cheered loudly, although one might have had trouble distinguishing genuine enthusiasm from the fear felt by some auditors that they might have appeared insufficiently antifascist.<sup>1</sup>

Böckelmann notes an obvious weakness in this antifascist crusade sustained in Germany by the government, the media, educators, churches, and the entire culture industry. "It depends on the materialization of evil. Those who imagine that they are resistance fighters need Nazis around." Every now and then they can point to the real thing, e.g., people wearing Hitler shirts kicking up a row at a soccer game, or anarchists trying to offend the easily intimidated public. Antifascists in Germany are in all probability "grateful for these isolated embodiments," for

without them it would be harder to show that the antifascists are bravely resisting an imminent “return to 1933.” This after all is the disaster that Germans are urged to be on guard against.<sup>2</sup>

The antifascist grand spectacle, according to Böckelmann, requires a bit of improvisation. “A Germany that has actually forgotten its own past deposits the years 1933 to 1945 into the immediate present and delights in acting as the conscience of humanity.”<sup>3</sup> Playing this role requires a steady adaptation of what Nazism was in order to make it fit present political concerns. Thus anyone who openly opposes admitting further Third World Muslims into Germany or advocates the requirement of German as an official language may be depicted by German politicians and media barons as talking the same language as the Nazis or going where we were before. This movable target, argues Böckelmann, is easily shifted, according to need. This happens despite the chronological and conceptual distance that exists between what now qualifies as “fascist” or “Nazi” and what the Third Reich did and taught. An aggressive racialism, the conquest of neighboring countries, the cult of the leader, the ruthless suppression of dissent, and (especially in the German case) virulent anti-Semitism—none of these characteristics seems widespread among most Germans today. Indeed, if there is a threat to liberty in present-day Germany, it is coming mostly from those who are waging a crusade against an arbitrarily defined enemy.

It is possible to see how a demonization of undesirable people may persist even if these groups have dwindled numerically or even vanished. For example, Spanish Catholic nationalists feared the presence of hidden Jewish forces in Spain long after those Jews who were unconverted were forced to leave in 1492. But those who feared Jewish influence (or the influence of Jewish *conversos* after 1492) did not simply attribute Jewishness to anyone who offended them. The rage and organizational élan that have accompanied crusades against fascism

are particularly remarkable given their often randomly chosen targets. This randomness is related to another problem, that definitions of fascism are at least as much based on free association as they are on confirmable evidence of real fascism.

The earlier chapters in this book demonstrate that in the 1920s and 1930s and even into the 1940s, those who spoke about fascism had a specific phenomenon in mind. Those who read or listened to them knew what that phenomenon was, and perhaps most importantly, fascists or Nazis identified themselves as such. This is not the process of identification that is currently taking place. Now, a Russian Jew in Germany or a Moroccan Jew in France who votes for a right-of-center nationalist party because he has noticed that Jews have been frequently assaulted by Muslim youth<sup>4</sup> and because he wishes to limit the number of young male Muslims coming into the country, may be linked through a process of increasingly free associations to the Third Reich.

Typical of this antifascist rhetoric is pointing to the presence of a style of speech that allegedly goes back to the Nazis and interwar fascism. For example, when a Social Democratic deputy in the German Federal Diet, Martin Schulz, who had been a high ranking EU official, responded to a speech about migrants by AfD chief Alexander Gauland in December 2018, he denounced a “style of communication” that linked Gauland’s remarks to “what had been previously heard in this assembly.” This was an obvious allusion to Nazi deputies who had been elected to the Reichstag in the interwar period. Schulz then went on to stress that “democracy must guard against such people, who belong on the dung heap of history.”<sup>5</sup> The evidence of Nazi sympathy for Schulz was a style, not a true resemblance between Gauland’s complaint about unchecked immigration (a subject that should not be off-limits in a parliamentary assembly) and a Nazi Party program. The style that elicited outrage featured nothing dehumanizing but

something that Schulz and his party elected not to discuss. That offending style (*Stilmittel*) may not be a style at all but a topic that those in power chose not to bring up.

Equally representative of surging antifascism in Germany has been the reaction to the election of a minister president in the Thuringian provincial assembly in February 2020. Initially this position was to go to the head of the centrist Free Democrats, Thomas Kemmerich. But Kemmerich could only obtain the votes needed for his election by requesting support from the Alternative für Deutschland, which had garnered twenty-three percent of the total vote in a recent provincial election. An outcry then went out from the German media that Kemmerich had dared to solicit votes from Nazis and Nazi-sympathizers.

At this point Chancellor Merkel stepped in and condemned the “inexcusable behavior” of Kemmerich and the Thuringian assembly for negotiating with a party that she too apparently believed or at least intimated resembled Hitler’s party. Merkel then proceeded without any constitutional authority to impose her own choice of minister president for Thuringia, after forcing Kemmerich to withdraw his candidacy.<sup>6</sup> The German Chancellor selected a decidedly leftist candidate Bodo Ramelow, whom the cowed assembly dutifully confirmed. Whereupon Antifa groups swung into action and threatened Kemmerich and his family. German journalists simultaneously condemned Kemmerich for wishing to collaborate in something “inexcusable” (*unverzeihlich*) that would have permitted the AfD to resume the Nazi Holocaust. The head of the Thuringian AfD, Björn Höcke, who is now considered in the English-speaking press to be the “firebrand of the German far right,” has been repeatedly likened to Hitler and stands accused of making speeches that “are riddled with words and phrases ‘confusingly similar’ to those used by the Nazis.”



One need not be a supporter of the AfD or of any other German party to notice that these accusations verge on hysteria. They are intended to keep German voters in the antinational, antifascist and pro-immigration, lane where media and educational leaders wish them to stay. Even the brash Höcke, who hardly minces words on the hustings, bears little programmatic resemblance to an interwar Nazi demagogue. However provocatively he has warned against further Third World immigration, this was hardly a signature Hitlerian position. And Höcke's exhortation that Germans "reverse direction" and cease cultivating a politics of guilt hardly demonstrates that he is a Nazi.

Least of all is there justification for the view that Kemmerich's decision to accept AfD votes to become minister president would have endangered the lives of groups that had suffered under the Nazis. This attack is unfortunately typical of the direction in which antifascist activists have tried to pull German citizens.<sup>7</sup> An East German novelist, Uwe Tellkamp, has spoken mockingly of the "disposition corridor" (*Gesinnungskorridor*) into which the German leadership class has forced German public opinion.<sup>8</sup> Tellkamp, who lived under a Communist regime in Dresden, is amazed by how easily the antifascist Federal Republic of Germany has taken over repressive Communist practices. Tellkamp's fellow East German, the writer Daniela Krien explained in an interview with the Tagesspiegel why she decided to move back to the former DDR: "In the East something has been preserved and remained, a German identity that has been lost in the West, which has fused with the identity of its Allied Occupiers. That never happened in the East in relation to the Soviets. I think that may be the reason for the strengthening of national conservative forces here."<sup>9</sup> Particularly upsetting for German patriots, who seem to be found mostly in the East, is this statement made by Merkel to Die Welt; "Germans are whoever decides to come to us."<sup>10</sup>

## <A>The Antifascist Academy

An equally interesting example of wielding the F-word can be found in Timothy Snyder's denunciation of Donald Trump in The Guardian (October 30, 2018). According to Snyder, like President Trump, "the Nazis claimed a monopoly of victimhood."<sup>11</sup> Like the fascists, "Trump and some of his supporters mount a strategy of deterrence by narcissism: if you note our debts to fascism, we will up the pitch of the whining." All Snyder manages to prove here is that Trump behaves like other presidents when he is beset by a hostile press. It is difficult to see how Trump has been more fascist in this respect than FDR, who denounced and tried to ban from press conferences abrasive Republican journalists.<sup>12</sup> How does Trump compare as a fascist to Harry Truman, who as president wrote a letter to Washington Post music critic Paul Hume threatening to punch him in the nose because Hume panned a singing performance by Truman's daughter?<sup>13</sup>

An equally glaring misuse of the charge of fascism shows up in a commentary on Senator Bernie Sanders by National Review columnist Kevin Williamson. According to Williamson, Sanders "may call himself a socialist, but so did Mussolini for a long time."<sup>14</sup> Sanders's onetime opposition to immigration, we are told, indicates that he was "all too happy to appropriate the rhetorical scheme of the altright knuckleheads." Williamson seems not to know that both the European Left and American labor unions were long on record opposing unskilled or low-skilled immigrants moving into their countries. One wonders why such a policy should be regarded as peculiarly characteristic of Italian fascism.

Examples of such antifascist free association abound in American academic literature. In a widely discussed polemic, Jason Stanley, the Jacob Urowsky Professor of Philosophy at Yale University explains to us How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us against Them (2018). Stanley dwells on certain ominous tendencies that he identifies with fascism, some of which he may have

drawn from The Authoritarian Personality. Among those tendencies that offend are appeals to “a mythic past,” “anti-intellectualism,” and “sexual anxiety” when “the patriarchal hierarchy is threatened by growing gender equity.” Stanley confesses to being especially sensitive to these traits for personal reasons. In 1939 his father left Nazi Germany only to enter an America then beset by its own fascist danger. The America that awaited Manfred Stanley was tainted by the “America First” movement and other forms of antiwar isolationism. These threats to tolerance and equality came back with a vengeance in 2016 when “Donald Trump revived ‘America First’ as one of his slogans, and from his first week in office, his administration has ceaselessly pursued travel bans on immigration, including refugees, specifically singling out Arab countries.”<sup>15</sup>

Throughout this account of how Stanley produced his tract against Trump and Trump’s apparent embrace of Nazism are questionable historical statements. America First, pace Stanley, had nothing to do with pro-Nazi advocates, as demonstrated by the works of Wayne Cole, Justus Doenecke, and other historians.<sup>16</sup> The 1924 Immigration Act was not legislation devised exclusively by xenophobes. This piece of legislation that restricted immigration had behind it a broad range of support, including the American Federation of Labor.<sup>17</sup> Stanley’s father, who like my own family escaped from the Nazis in the late 1930s, certainly underwent material and emotional hardship. But the catastrophe from which Stanley Senior escaped was something far worse than what his son is lamenting, namely, Donald Trump’s decision to do what his predecessors had already attempted, by enacting a limited travel ban.

Almost all attempts to depict President Trump and other leaders whom antifascists dislike as Nazi tyrants lapse into fantasy. This tendency is basic to redefinitions of antifascism in which demonization is dressed up as historical analysis. Jason Stanley works especially hard to create a

fit between fascism and Donald Trump's connections to entrepreneurial capitalism. According to Stanley, "[i]n fascism, the *state* is an enemy; it is to be replaced by the nation, which consists of self-sufficient individuals..." and "...fascist ideology involves something at least superficially akin to the libertarian ideal of self-sufficiency and freedom from the state." Supposedly fascists share with other social Darwinists the ideals of "hard work, private enterprise and self-sufficiency."<sup>18</sup> They also follow in the path of Mussolini "who denounces the world's great cities, such as New York, for their teeming populations of nonwhites."<sup>19</sup> Stanley's book offers unverified historical statements that in some cases are patently false. Italian fascism famously glorified the state and taught "*tutto nello stato, niente fuori dello stato*." It was German Nazism, which Stanley never bothers to distinguish from Italian fascism, which placed *das Volk* above the state. But neither movement followed libertarian teachings nor pretended to. Christian journalist Ron Dreher is correct when he suggests that Stanley's real intent is to stifle any discussion he disapproves of.<sup>20</sup> Like his colleague at Yale, Timothy Snyder, Stanley moves from what he finds politically distasteful to ascriptions of fascist intolerance and finally, calls for protective measures against a perceived enemy.

#### <A>Fascism Just Around the Corner

While Stanley's colleague at Yale and fellow antifascist, Timothy Snyder, has fulminated in the newspaper against the Trump presidency, he has also provided more historically oriented warnings that allegedly emanate from his reflections as a research scholar. In On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century, Snyder explains that "[b]oth fascism and communism were responses to globalization: to the real and perceived inequalities it created and the apparent helplessness of the democracies in addressing them. Fascists rejected reason in the

name of will, denying objective truth in favor of glorious myth articulated by leaders who claimed to give voice to the people. They put a face on globalization, arguing that its complex challenges were a result of a conspiracy against the nation. Fascists ruled for a decade or two, leaving behind an intact intellectual legacy that grows more relevant by the day.”<sup>21</sup> In the prologue to Twenty Lessons, Snyder makes key assumptions about the oppositional Right that are essential to his view of fascism. For example, he asserts that fascism has bequeathed to us an “intact intellectual legacy,” which (to say the least) is a contestable point. Do we really see Western governments calling for a fascist-type corporatist economy? Do our national media advertise a philosophy of the will, of the kind that fascist authors of the interwar era were promoting? What about a call for wars, to furnish the dominant nationality with *Lebensraum* or to restore the glory of the Roman Empire?

Snyder does try to validate his argument by making fascism fit a tailor-made definition, as an authoritarian alternative to “globalization,” one that treats “complex challenges” as “a conspiracy against the nation.” According to Snyder, Donald Trump’s attempt to renegotiate international trade agreements for American workers indicates fascist tendencies. We are urged to resist the adversaries of globalization, since “anticipatory obedience” to fascist and Nazi tyranny allowed evil acts to occur in Germany and Austria.<sup>22</sup> One need not excuse such terrible things in the 1930s as *Kristallnacht* in order to ask a highly relevant question. What do Nazi crimes have to do with globalization and its critics? Snyder offers for our physical and moral protection a medley of not very original maxims, e.g., “contribute to good causes,” “believe in truth,” “learn from peers in other countries,” “make eye contact and small talk,” “remember professional ethics,” “defend institutions,” “make a private life,” which are intended to prepare

us for the impending struggle. Snyder highlights incidents and events from the struggle against Nazi Germany to prepare us for the worst.

Mark Bray has expressed most of the same views as Stanley and Snyder about a fascist menace. He also finds considerable overlap between what happened in Europe in the 1930s and “Trump’s America.” Unlike other antifascists, however, Bray is not writing principally for the academic community or for what today passes for the world of letters. Less than two years after the demonstrations of September 2011, Bray published a booklet, Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street that designate such activism as the first stage of an anarchist struggle against fascist-tinged capitalism.<sup>23</sup> As demonstrations against this system mount and become increasingly disruptive, capitalism, it is hoped, will collapse and be replaced by a people’s economy.

Unlike more garden-variety academic antifascists, Bray is consciously reclaiming the socialist antifascist tradition of the interwar years. He points admiringly to the German and Spanish Communists of an earlier era and repeats their calls for an end to capitalism and the downfall of its fascist supporters. In his Anti-fascist Handbook, Bray retells the history of fascism from the 1920s down to the present.<sup>24</sup> There is nothing in this presentation that has not already been said by the traditional far Left, and clearly Bray is reaching back to connect with this older, pristine leftist tradition. He depicts the struggle between fascists and everyone on the Left, including the Communists, as the great battle between evil and good to which we are now being forced to return. This romance of the Left, which Bray follows back into the interwar period, is interwoven in his narrative.

In his third chapter, we do find some of the same scenes that illustrate Snyder’s discussion, e.g. neo-Nazis attacking Syrian refugees.<sup>25</sup> Bray dwells on the victory of among

other villains the Golden Dawn, which became a leading parliamentary party in Greece in 2012. While Bray was then visiting Greece, Golden Dawn, which does proudly flaunt fascist symbols, was gaining adherents in the face of a growing refugee problem. It remained Greece's third most popular party as late as 2017.<sup>26</sup> Given the generally poor living conditions in most of sub-Saharan Africa and the likelihood that the population of Africa, which has now reached over a billion, will quadruple, according to UN figures, in less than a century,<sup>27</sup> and given the perpetual civic turmoil in the Middle East, it seems likely that a refugee problem will continue to bedevil Europe.

Bray spots fascism even in some unlikely situations, e.g., when members of Merkel's Christian Democratic coalition, "aggressively pursued the swelling AfD electorate by proposing a ban on burkas in public and a new Integration Law that would control where refugees can live and force them to learn German language, culture, and history."<sup>28</sup> This proposed Integration Law would not have the effect of segregating Syrian refugees in Germany, but it would have pushed them into learning the German language. Requiring this minimal standard of assimilation does not represent a return to Nazism.

Like other antifascist polemicists, Bray searches for his enemy among those who would appear to have little to do with real fascists. He trots out, for example, "Pinstripe Nazis," who supported the "white backlash" that put Donald Trump into the presidency and who rallied in France to the National Front (which has been renamed the Rassemblement National). Steve Bannon, Milo Yiannopolous, and various others are all painted with the same fascist brush. Bray has not only organized Antifa units in the US. He also helped create in Kurdish Rojava in 2015 an International Freedom Battalion that incorporates communist and anarchist activists from across Europe. He even pulled into this enterprise supplementary volunteers from Turkey and

Kurdistan.<sup>29</sup> With obvious pride Bray informs us that he has modeled his antifascist coalition on the International Brigades that fought for the Left in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>30</sup>

To his credit, however, he does address two questions that less inquisitive antifascists typically eschew. The first question is whether there is a fit between the current fascism and whatever forms that movement took in interwar Europe. Although both fascisms were devised to serve the ruling class and exploit impoverished minorities, they nonetheless reveal palpable differences. For example, the older fascism was primarily an interwar Central European phenomenon, while the fascism that Bray decries has now spread everywhere in the West. Moreover, the older form of fascism was more explicitly militaristic and less friendly toward a global economy.

Despite such variations, Bray assures us, there is enough of a likeness between the old and new forms of fascisms to betray a family resemblance. And the comparison being drawn has strategic value: the enemy whom the antifascists have in their crosshairs provides solidarity for the protestors.<sup>31</sup> The second question is whether Bray intends to accept free speech or in any way tolerate his opposition. For Bray, these questions are mostly irrelevant distractions from revolutionary activities. “The antiauthoritarian principle of individual and collective autonomy promotes a vision of human diversity and plurality at odds with the stifling homogeneity of capitalist consumer culture. If fascists were to start organizing in such a society, antiauthoritarian anti-fascists would still organize to shut them down, but they would not construct massive prisons to lock them up as the American government has done to countless political prisoner over the generations.” Further, Bray explains, “even if you agree that shutting down fascist organizing constitutes an infringement upon the free speech of fascists, it is still patently obvious



that anti-fascists advocate for far more free speech in society than liberals, both quantitatively and qualitatively.”

It is essential for understanding such statements to recognize that for Bray the antifascists are in mortal combat with institutions that depend on a capitalist ruling class. “Militant anti-fascism challenges the state monopoly on political legitimacy by making a political case for popular sovereignty from below.” Bray reports that antifascists do not subscribe to the “liberal notion that all political ‘opinions’ are equal,” and they “unabashedly attack the legitimacy of fascism and institutions that support it.”<sup>32</sup> Bray’s underlying assumption is that we are already deep into a civil war between fascists and antifascists; therefore the question of providing a platform for one’s adversary is no longer worth considering. We are warned against “the liberal alternative to militant anti-fascism,” which “is to have faith in the power of rational discourse, the police, and the institutions of government to prevent the ascension of a fascist regime,” and points to “the failure of the allied strategy of appeasement leading up to World War II.”<sup>33</sup>

Bray’s contentions raise multiple questions. What precisely in our present situation corresponds to the one that allowed Hitler to take power in Germany? How are those who favor an open debate of political differences practicing the appeasement politics of those who failed to stop Hitler? We are also not told who exactly were those “liberal” antifascists who tried to appease the Nazis, whether the reference is to those European leaders who wished to avoid another war with Germany. There was nothing specifically liberal about figures like Lord Halifax and Edward VIII in England, or Mussolini in 1938 who opposed a military confrontation with Nazi Germany. European Communist parties also favored appeasement for a time, that is, between September 1939 and March 1941, while Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia were allied. Even murkier are Bray’s references to the fascists who benefit from “rational discourse.”

On one point I do agree with Bray and my own onetime professor Herbert Marcuse. We are now dealing with an artificial “tolerance” that is manipulated by those in high places for their own benefit. For a confirmation of this assertion, one need only read the perfunctory point-counterpoint debates in our newspapers, or our typical Republican versus Democrat staged discussions. Here one perceives the strenuously maintained limits of public political discussion. Yet it is difficult to comprehend how these staged debates between often vacuous alternatives are allowing a fascist will to prevail.

One can no longer even be surprised to find attacks in what we are told are conservative publications, which depict Trump’s America careening toward fascism every bit as hyperbolic as Bray’s rhetoric. Thus the “conservative realist” National Interest published a feature essay by Amitai Etzioni on August 1, 2020 about how “Donald Trump is changing the country in ways that should have all Americans concerned.” Etzioni’s title asks “Is America on the Road to Becoming an Authoritarian State?” The rest of the narrative centers on the connections between growing up as a Jew in Nazi Germany and having to watch Donald Trump take the US down an eerily similar path toward a racist dictatorship.<sup>34</sup> Such attacks are hardly limited to the established Left. As neoconservative-aligned publications and websites, particularly Bulwark, have moved strategically into the Democratic camp, they sound more and more like the subjects of this chapter when assailing Trump’s “fascism.”<sup>35</sup>

Bray’s work raises the question about what is a true Marxist. The post-Marxist Left plays loosely with antifascist labels. Neither Kautsky nor Hilferding nor Rosa Luxemburg would have recognized in his complaints about prejudice a Marxist analysis of capitalism in crisis. Bray fails to analyze the corporate capitalist power which he assures us is behind the fascist superstructure of ideas that is catapulting fascist politicians into power. The fact that German citizens are

concerned about the arrival of a million and a half Muslim migrants from the Third World proves neither the existence of a fascist threat nor the operation of a repressive capitalist structure. Large corporations are among the last actors who would be inciting xenophobia in the contemporary West. Further, there is nothing peculiarly capitalistic about the resistance to dramatic demographic change, which would be equally understandable in a socialist country.

#### <A>South American “Fascism”

A precedent for the indiscriminate use of fascism that this chapter has explored may be found in how South American governments have been described by American educators and political journalists. Among such supposedly fascist governments have been the semi-authoritarian rule of Getulio Vargas in Brazil from 1930 to 1945,<sup>36</sup> the various incarnations of Juan Peron in Argentina from the late 1930s until his death in 1974, and the dictatorial presidency of Augusto Pinochet, in collaboration with the Chilean military from 1973 to 1990. At least some shadow of evidence can be furnished for this charge from the now distant past. Vargas, who was an industrial modernizer with a populist flair, did sidle up to Nazi Germany until 1940, partly because his country sold lots of Brazilian coffee and cotton to the Germans and partly because Vargas was thumbing his nose at the *Norteamericanos*. But this Brazilian leader then turned around and supported the Americans partly because he was appalled by Nazi tyranny and partly because FDR’s government worked to win his support. Peron expressed a political affinity for Mussolini in the late 1930s but later backed the Americans in World War Two because he assumed the Americans would win that struggle. He also did not become Argentine president until after World War Two, in 1946, after having served in several earlier governments.<sup>37</sup> Both Vargas and Peron imitated some of the theatrical features of Latin fascism (like gaudy uniforms

and mass rallies) and cobbled together and then disposed of their own versions of a corporate “new state.”

South American leaders who temporarily took over fascist trappings were never full-fledged fascists and were happy to give themselves new looks. Peron by the end of his political career was linking his makeshift economic policies (which proved disastrous for his country) to expressions of admiration for Maoist China. Since 1946, ten Argentine presidents, some with radically different economic policies, have belonged to the Justicialist Party founded by Peron. Vargas in his last phase as a Brazilian president in the early 1950s was an unmistakable technocrat, which is what he had started out as when he took power in 1930. Pinochet was an anti-Communist general, who established a military government after overthrowing a Marxist president, Salvador Allende, whom the Chilean middle-class thought had gone too far in nationalizing the economy and establishing a one-party leftist government. Military dictatorship also came to Argentina between 1976 and 1983, and it treated the Left brutally.

But this does not prove that either Pinochet or his Argentine counterparts were fascists as opposed to anti-Communist generals. (The two are not the same.) What happened, quite predictably, was military juntas took over countries wracked by civil discord. The Argentine *golpe de estado* in 1976 occurred after the right-wing and left-wing Peronistas, began fighting each other in the streets of Buenos Aires, following Peron’s death. Juan Linz, Amos Perlmutter, and Stanley Payne have all stressed that authoritarian governments have been the rule in Latin American countries.<sup>38</sup> Further, these scholars relate the governments they discuss to a social structure in which the bourgeoisie never really came to power. Whether or not one approves of these regimes, it would be stretching the F-word (albeit not for the first time) to refer to them, even the ones that are anti-Marxist, as fascist.

References to South American fascism usually mean that military rule has prevailed somewhere south of the American border. This rule has sometimes involved a charismatic leader who promises economic reform. But this was not an exclusively interwar phenomenon and it showed no indication of the revolutionary nationalism or quest to restore lost empires that marked European fascism. Merriam and Webster and the *Times Literary Supplement* have both identified the Justicialist Party in Argentina, and presumably all the presidents who belonged to it, as fascist.<sup>39</sup> Fascism is now coming up with reference to Jair Bolsonaro, the president of Brazil who is trying to modernize the Brazilian economy and fighting administrative corruption.<sup>40</sup> Since Bolsonaro succeeded a leftist government and is known for his populist style, he too is tarred with the fascist label. The assignment of that label is by now a frequent practice among the Western media, and its application to South American governments has a venerable genealogy.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/deutsche-historiker-stellen-sich-gegen-die-afd-15812149.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Böckelmann, "Nazis Raus," *Tumult* (Winter 2018/19), 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/juden-in-der-afd-warum-sich-eine-juedische-gruppe-in-der-afd-organisiert-a-1231676.html>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.morgenpost.de/politik/article215309549/Haushaltsdebatte-im-Bundestag-Schlagabtausch-erwartet.html>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/kemmerich-tritt-zurueck-merkels-maximaler-druck-16620549.html>.

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- <sup>7</sup> <https://www.tichyseinblick.de/kolumnen/spahns-spitzwege/der-ewige-landtag-wie-die-hysterie-thueringen-in-die-sackgasse-trieb/>.
- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.zeit.de/2020/05/uwe-tellkamp-schriftsteller-lesungen-dresden-afd-zensur>.
- <sup>9</sup> Tagesspiegel, 10 June 2019
- <sup>10</sup> Die Welt, 27 February 2017
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/30/trump-borrows-tricks-of-fascism-pittsburgh>.
- <sup>12</sup> See David Beito's well-documented presentation of "FDR's War against the Press" in Reason (May 2017), <https://reason.com/archives/2017/04/05/roosevelts-war-against-the-press>.
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/trivia/letter.htm>
- <sup>15</sup> Jason Stanley, How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them (New York: Random House, 2018), xii-xiii; also 133-35.
- <sup>16</sup> See among other books on this subject Wayne Cole, America First: The Battle Against Intervention, 1940-1941, reprint (Read Books Limited, 2016); Justus D. Doenecke, The Challenge to American Intervention (Krieger Publisher: Anvil series, 1996) and Storm on the Horizon: The Challenge to American Intervention, 1939-1941 (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).
- <sup>17</sup> <https://cis.org/Report/American-Unionism-and-US-Immigration-Policy>.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, 178-79.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 153.
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/swinburne-jason-stanley-homosexuality/>.

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<sup>21</sup> Timothy Snyder, On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century (New York City: Tim Dugan Books, 2017), 12.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Bray, Translating Anarchy: The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street (New York: Zero Books, 2013).

<sup>24</sup> Mark Bray, Antifa: The Anti-Fascist Handbook (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2017, 3-39.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 82-83.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 96-104.

<sup>27</sup> See La France Interdite, 60-62; and Hugues Lagrange's two works on the effects of sub-Saharan immigration to France, Le déni des cultures (Paris: Seuil, 2010), and En terre étrangère. Vies d'immigrés du Sahel en Île-de-France (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 125-26.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 32-36.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 134-35.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>34</sup> <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-road-becoming-authoritarian-state-165990?fbclid=IwAR2VkKILzOFVjCaE4xzRujObelJ8aI6AKIY29XwJRNNMxtJGhV9TIZ82HYU>

<sup>35</sup> <https://thebulwark.com/trumps-authoritarian-impulse/>

<sup>36</sup> See Jens R. Hentschke, Vargas and Brazil: New Perspectives (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

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<sup>37</sup> Alejandro Horowicz in Los cuatros peronismos (Buenos Aires: Hysperamerica, 1987) treats Peron's periods of rule and the changing movement he left behind by examining their differences as well as overlaps.

<sup>38</sup> See Juan L. Linz, Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes (Boulder, CO: Lynn Riennder Publishers, 2000); Stanley G. Payne, Fascism: Comparison and Definition (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); Amos Perlmutter, Modern Authoritarianism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). John E. Fagg's Latin America: A General History (New York: Macmillan, 1963) makes this point about the perennial character of Latin American authoritarianism less judgmentally than Linz or Perlmutter.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/41891/streitbare-demokratie>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/30/jair-bolsonaro-denies-he-is-a-fascist-brazilian-churchill>



## Chapter Five: Antifascism vs. Populism

Antifascists have mounted a crusade against a feared enemy, but not necessarily the one they claim to be combating. In November 2018 French president Emmanuel Macron compared the current political unrest to the crisis that existed on the European continent in the 1930s. “In a Europe that is divided by fears, retreat into nationalism, and the consequences of economic crisis, one sees almost methodically articulating itself all that punctuated the life of Europe from the post-World War One era up to the crisis of 1929.”<sup>1</sup> On the centenary of Italian fascism’s birth in 2019, the television channel Europe 1 informed viewers that “fascism has now revived under the form of ‘populism.’”<sup>2</sup> Developments like the creation of a ruling coalition in Italy allied with the right-of-center Lega Nord’s Matteo Salvini and the emergence of a populist Right throughout the West, supposedly prove a fascist resurgence. Today fascist ideology “has become once again an instrument that treats as normal the virility of the strong man and the brutality of simplistic thinking.” And “[i]ndeed, democracy can die with a small fire or else go up in flames all at once.” A menace embodied by the old and new forms of fascism alike is “the determination to educate generations that would not resemble those of the past.” Presumably, antifascist efforts to monitor cultural and educational resources have been aimed at keeping neo-fascists from returning to a past that will not pass.

Perhaps second only to President Trump as an object of attack as a fascist has been Vladimir Putin. The Russian president has brought together the likes of Newsweek<sup>3</sup> and the neoconservative National Interest in shared impressions, with the latter definitively pronouncing Russia to be “an unconsolidated fascist state.”<sup>4</sup> George Will upped the ante of his neoconservative colleagues in 2014 when he announced that “Putin’s fascist revival carries

echoes of Hitler.”<sup>5</sup> This seemingly hastily thrown together brief suggests that Putin has acted aggressively to regain territory lost by his country during the collapse of the Soviet Empire. He has also ruled in an authoritarian fashion, which is undisputed. But more qualified critical perspectives are needed.<sup>6</sup> One does not have to approve of Putin to observe that he’s a nationalist who appeals to Christian traditionalists.

Antifascism in its present form relates to a configuration of ideas and policies that belong to the “post-Marxist Left.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike the traditional Marxist Left and its more moderate variations, the post-Marxist Left accentuates the need for cultural transformation while making war on traditional social and gender identities. This activist Left, as indicated above in the words of former Weather Underground member Eric Mann,<sup>8</sup> associates the evil in need of removal with white Christian men and with the oppressive civilization that this group has produced. The Left in both France and Germany has also accused the generic Right of being linked to the Third Reich and, however circuitously, to Nazi atrocities. German journalists and politicians have been particularly eager to charge their own real or imaginary Right with minimizing or trivializing Nazi crimes, and with ignoring the history of the German people leading up to Hitler’s reign of terror.

Giving voice to these German antifascist concerns, Thomas Haldenwang, president of the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz), an agency that oversees “extremist” dangers to Germany’s democratic order, warned Berliners in May 2019 against a surging far Right. Haldenwang designated as a public danger those German citizens who view the historical past differently from his own agency. Haldenwang singled out unredeemable reactionaries who regard May 8, 1945 as the day of Germany’s catastrophic defeat. He also scolded those who dwell on a fact that is not meant to be noticed, namely that about half a

million German civilians were killed in aerial bombing toward the end of World War Two.

Noticing these things puts the offender in the same category as Muslim terrorists, namely as threats to German democracy.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, “extremists” who have stated inconvenient but demonstrable historical facts too emphatically have been subject to police searches and threats of detention as fascist sympathizers.

What makes this antifascism in its most recent manifestations stand out is its increasingly frenetic nature.<sup>10</sup> In Germany, for example, the government has singled out the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) from among a medley of political parties as an anti-democratic threat.<sup>11</sup> AfD members are being forced out of public posts while the Left engages in assaults and vandalism against party officials often with impunity.<sup>12</sup> The admission of more than a million and a half migrants into Germany since 2016 has led to intense criticism in some quarters, and this has brought reprisals against those who express unwelcome opinions. No right of center German party is safe from government prosecution or from mayhem, which is often incited by the media. Entirely typical of the program and dominant views of AfD is Widerworte, a work by Alice Weidel, the co-chairman of the AfD faction in the German Upper House (Bundestag). Save for brief references to the German war of liberation during the Napoleonic Wars and the celebration of German democrats and liberals in previous times, one finds nothing even remotely nationalist in Weidel’s critique of her government’s spending, educational, and immigration policies. Thinkers who are held up for special approbation are the English classical liberal John Locke and defenders of the free market like Friedrich Hayek. Indeed there is nothing in Weidel’s book that would not turn up in a discussion of German politics by an American center Right newspaper, say, Wall Street Journal.<sup>13</sup>

Another factor that warrants consideration in order to make sense of the present antifascism is its top-down character. It is an elitist ideology, which claims to represent the alien and oppressed. Politicians like Macron, who are beholden to international bankers and multinational industrialists, are rushing to join French anti-nationalists, like Bernard-Henri Lévy<sup>14</sup> and the editorial board of Libération, in protesting a rising fascist tide. This threat supposedly goes beyond those resisting the Left's cultural, administrative, and/or educational dominance. The establishment, which has taken up antifascist rhetoric, is facing an obstreperous, politically organized opposition to its concept of liberal democracy. Most frighteningly for the power elites, the "fascists" are now raising what seems to be the banner of revolution and claiming to speak for "the people."

Contrary to what its defenders may think, liberal democracy is held to be a closed system by those who do not enjoy its advantages. For the French who reside in the peripheries of their country rather than in urban or suburban areas, liberal democracy is a spoils system that benefits migrants, foreigners on social welfare, government employees, tenured professors, and LGBTQ supporters. Sixty-seven percent of French interviewees in a 2018 survey objected strenuously to the generous government support given to a Third World population streaming into France.<sup>15</sup> Forty-one percent of those interviewed define themselves specifically as "French nationalists," as compared to only twenty percent among their German neighbors.<sup>16</sup> Seventy-two percent believe that immigration has engendered "disquieting problems for our country"; and fifty-four percent consider immigration to be "a political project aimed at replacing one civilization by another deliberately organized by our intellectual and media elites."<sup>17</sup> Only eleven percent of those French interviewed believe that immigrants can be "integrated into French society." These answers should not surprise us.

Many books are available correlating government- and media-sponsored immigration from Africa and the Near East with the rise of a populist Right. According to Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin in National Populism and the Revolt against Liberal Democracy, these anti-elitist protests have produced a snowball effect and typically attract a mélange of protesting groups, from traditional patriots and Christian traditionalists to alienated members of the older socialist Left. Eatwell and Goodwin argue persuasively that the association of the new populism with a down-and-out working class overlooks the presence of better educated traditional conservatives. Eighty-one percent of Donald Trump's vote in 2016 came not from a financially battered, semi-literate working class, which may have been the target of Hillary Clinton's "basket of deplorables" remark. Most of Trump's voters were in fact white-bread Republicans who viewed the Democrats as unpatriotic and culturally hostile.<sup>18</sup>

Among populist groups in every Western country one finds a passionate revulsion for the culturally leftist media and the professoriate. The same groups manifest a dislike for global financial elites that are thought to be antagonistic to national work forces. Those who view themselves as cultural radicals or progressives are discovering they have no real standing among the populists as true revolutionaries. The populists who are rebelling against them scorn their rulers as elitists. Branding populists as fascists may represent an attempt by the cultural Left to reclaim the moral high ground. Antifascist intellectuals and the verbalizing class are stuck in a strange alliance with plutocrats and government administrators, against an old leftist constituency that is gravitating toward the populist Right. It is therefore strategically imperative for the antifascists to bring back to honor liberal democratic cosmopolites as the only recognized Left. This has required the construction of an historic confrontation between themselves and would-be followers of Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco. This quest for the appearance of the moral

high ground has necessitated an orchestrated struggle between “tolerance” and “intolerance,” in which the enemies of “fascism” stand for Progress and cosmopolitanism.

According to Eatwell and Goodwin, while liberal democracy is perceptibly under attack, the accusation against their opponents as “fascists” is overblown. Calling for referenda on immigration or opposing LGBT initiatives may be a good or bad thing. But there is nothing fascist about holding views on these subjects that do not accord with those of our political and cultural elites. Nor does the fact that populist leaders come forth to speak for like-minded followers mean that we are on the path to fascist authoritarian rule.<sup>19</sup> But some opponents of this populist wave may in fact think that the Western world is returning to an ominous interwar past. Typical of this last group are left leaning intellectuals who protest passionately against Viktor Orban’s “fascist” government in Hungary and the AFD in Germany. Such people may be genuinely worried about a return to those conditions that allowed the Nazis and their allies to wreak havoc in the 1930s. But this antifascist anxiety sometimes verges on the hysterical, for example when the venerable Board of Deputies of British Jews in March 2019 castigated a former Conservative minister of Indian descent (married to a Jewish husband) for referring to the Labour far Left as “cultural Marxists.”<sup>20</sup>

“Cultural Marxism” (which is admittedly not the best term to designate what is meant here) is charged with carrying anti-Semitic and possibly Nazi connotations.<sup>21</sup> The term actually describes a particular movement for change, which combines some elements of Marxist socialism with a call for sexual and cultural revolution. Among critics of this effort to transform Marxism into cultural revolutionary doctrine have been both traditional Marxists and members of the interwar Right. But this onetime association of the term with the far Right hardly indicates that designating cultural radicals as cultural Marxists is a peculiarly Nazi practice.<sup>22</sup> Such

signature cultural Marxist positions as attacking traditional gender roles and Western national identities first surfaced among interwar cultural radicals with Marxist leanings and later became integral to the antifascist Left. To recognize this lineage is to note the obvious; and so is the perception that what we are describing is only distantly related to traditional Marxism and therefore should be qualified with the adjective “cultural.”

Among the “fascist” symptoms that antifascists decry are, curiously enough, features of an older Left that the populists have revived. A resistance to Third World immigration that might impact negatively on the indigenous work force was for generations a characteristically leftist position. The American Federation of Labor under its founder Samuel Gompers rallied to the Immigration Act of 1924, which decisively cut back immigration to the United States. The head of the United Farm Workers Cesar Chavez railed against illegal immigration and especially against the practice of replacing union members with cheap foreign labor.<sup>23</sup> One of the most vigorous anti-immigration activists in the United States in the 1970s was a black Democratic Congresswoman from Texas, Barbara Jordan (1936–1996). Jordan’s once resolute stand as a champion of vulnerable workers has now vanished from the historical record.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, a critical stance toward immigration was by no means peculiar to the American working class Left and its advocates. The French Communist Party strongly opposed importing North Africans lest jobs were taken away from Frenchmen. As late as 1982, Georges Marchais, who headed the party, published an editorial in the French Communist newspaper *l’Humanité* that denounced the use of immigration by the capitalist class to displace French workers.<sup>25</sup>

The current Left’s open borders position stands in glaring contrast to what were once traditional leftist views. An older Left would have denounced the move toward open borders as a “neoliberal” trick intended to expand capitalist fortunes at the expense of low-paid workers.

What would have equally disconcerted an older Left is the antifascist Left's unwillingness to allow Western peoples to preserve their national identities. One need not exaggerate the nationalism of the traditional Marxist Left to notice that the antifascist assault on Western identities would have reduced an older Left to utter bemusement. The longtime editor of the Communist L'Humanité, Georges Cogniat, argued for the value of rooting Marxist-Leninism in a strong national consciousness. In a widely read book Réalité de la nation: L'attrape-nigaud du cosmopolitisme (1950),<sup>26</sup> Cogniat denounced the war against national borders as a tool by which neoliberal capitalists were robbing French laborers of their just wages. Cogniat and other French Communists even praised the virtue of "*enracinement*," that is, rootedness in an ethnic and national group, as a working-class strength. In any case antifascist hostility to displays of solidarity among European nations would have bewildered an older, less multicultural Left.<sup>27</sup>

Eatwell and Goodwin believe that populist leaders have benefited by invoking "Four Ds" in addressing their followers. They have appealed to "a more 'direct' model of democracy" because of "anxieties about the *destruction* of the nation that have been sharpened by rapid immigration," and strong concerns about "relative deprivation resulting from the shift towards an increasingly unequal economic settlement," "*distrust* of the increasingly elitist nature of liberal democracy," and "*de-alignment* from the traditional parties, which has rendered our political systems more volatile."<sup>28</sup>

The head of the old Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkaspárt, Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) since 1989, Gyula Thuermer, has now redefined himself as a National Communist. Thuermer expresses concern about the effects of immigration on the Hungarian working class and appeals to Hungarian national identity, like the present nationalist government of Viktor Orban. This Communist leader is as hostile as Orban to George Soros,



whom he regards as a vulture global capitalist. Thuermer does complain, however, that Orban has made too many concessions to the EU, so that Hungarians “buy German milk” while their own dairy farmers languish.<sup>29</sup> He has also dwelled on his overpowering sense of sadness as he stood in the Hall of Trianon outside Paris, where the Hungarian nation was stripped of more than half its territory after World War One.<sup>30</sup> Thuermer reproaches the “ruling elite” in Hungary since 1989 for neither “getting back Transylvania” from Romania nor doing anything to relieve the disabilities of the Hungarian minorities still living there. It is unimaginable that any German statesman would lament his country’s loss of territory in any past war without being attacked in the media as an unreconstructed fascist.

The liberal democratic establishment in the West, unlike the Hungarian Communist head, has catered to groups that have nothing in common with the indigenous working class, the Left’s historic base that is often condemned as bigoted and unenlightened. The establishment eagerly promotes leftist identity politics and Third World immigration, which has created a reservoir of cheap labor. It also seeks to break free of national attachments that an older, traditional Left in varying degrees affirmed. In this new friend-enemy alignment the populists are free to incorporate positions that were once peculiarly leftist. Social conflict no longer rages, as in an earlier era, between the owners of the means of production and their workers. This onetime inveterate conflict has been replaced by a new one, between antifascists and those accused of fascist sentiments. And behind these labels is a new class conflict, in which economic and media elites are allied to Third World immigrants and the underclass against both the traditional working class and surviving critics of leftist identity politics.

We might cite here the more optimistic view of this confrontation offered by Eatwell, Goodwin, and Markus Wagner of the University of Vienna. According to their interpretation of

current events, the competition between the populists and the liberal democratic establishment members, who are now attacking their adversaries as fascists, may not culminate in the defeat of either side. After the present strife, a post-populist deal may take place in which the warring sides will be partly accommodated.<sup>31</sup> Evidence for this deal is supposedly already available. The supporters of Brexit have won; and the government is removing their country from the EU, albeit on terms that won't imperil the English economy. Although the Rassemblement National in France (aka Front National) cannot rise in presidential races beyond the low thirtieth percentile, the government of Emanuel Macron has already taken preliminary measures to tighten immigration requirements. Members of the European Community, moreover, have set restrictions for migrants who are seeking asylum, and these displaced people will have to be approved at the EU borders before being allowed to settle anywhere among member states. Wagner, a professor at the University of Vienna who has spoken at AfD gatherings in Germany, believes things may be looking up for his still ostracized party. The AfD is increasing its popular backing, particularly in elections being held in the former East Germany.<sup>32</sup> According to Eatwell and Goodwin, the liberal democratic establishment may soon be inclined to make piecemeal accommodations to the populist opposition; and as in the case of Austria and Italy, coalitions will be formed to include those whom our elites are now stigmatizing as fascists.

#### <A>A Limited Populist Challenge and the Crusade Against Fascism

This happy outcome marked by mutual recognition of once warring parties may not however come to pass. The contending sides described here are not at all evenly matched. The antifascist liberal democratic establishment holds almost all the useful resources, from public administration, the educational system, donations from large corporations and funders like

George Soros down to a swelling immigrant electorate, and the culture industry. What evidence is there that the founder of the French New Right, Alain de Benoist, was correct when he asserted the following in an interview? “All of the political parties of the traditional type are in the process of being swept away by the force of these unprecedented and atypical movements.” Indeed “the resentment and hate of the political class as well as of their media and financial faithful are explained by the fact that they are like a bear on an ice block about to melt.”<sup>33</sup>

While the crusade against fascism has accelerated, the stand-in for fascism, namely populism, is stumbling in its ascent to power. The liberal democratic establishment has handed its rival a *fait accompli*, in the form of a large Third World immigrant population and a vast panoply of programs intended to serve this clientele. Theo Sarrazin’s Deutschland schafft sich ab and Laurent Obertone’s La France Interdite both show that there is overwhelming support for Third World immigration coming from the media in Germany and France, together with media defenses of the programs earmarked for immigrants.<sup>34</sup> In 2016, the year that Obertone’s study highlights, the French government spent 756 billion Euros on social programs which went disproportionately to an immigrant clientele. Although Macron referred to this amount as “a nutty sum (*pognon dingue*),” he and his government are not likely to reduce it.<sup>35</sup> Nor would the media likely tolerate such cuts. Further, the number of indigenous women in Western Europe who choose to bear children continues to decline, while the number of Third World immigrant women giving birth to children has stayed the same. In 2016 autochthonous French made up 80% of the population but were responsible for less than 60% of births. Of 783, 640 registered births in France in 2016, 30.9% came from immigrants, who were mostly from Africa, and who constituted only 9.7 % of the French population. We may doubt that much has changed in these matters since the completion of Obertone’s research.

French scholar Jérôme Fourquet demonstrates in L'Archipel français,<sup>36</sup> that the populist strategy of forging an alliance between the socially traditional bourgeois and an insecure working class may be less and less workable in his country. According to Fourquet, the autochthones (*Français de souche*) are divided into three very distinct groups: urban bourgeois who identify socially with the Left, the Catholic bourgeois who are economically pro-interventionist but socially conservative, and a vast undifferentiated mass of French inhabitants who are culturally and politically shaped by American fashions and values. Fourquet asks whether these heterogeneous groups could be brought together to form a French populist majority. Unfortunately for this plan, even the children of the Catholic bourgeois have been gravitating toward a profoundly secularized youth culture.

There is also little evidence that German voters are challenging the system to the degree that antifascists and populists both suggest. One might think from recent efforts by Thomas Haldenwang and his federal intelligence agency (*Bundesverfassung*) to ban the AfD as a “hate party” that the AfD is romping to victory.<sup>37</sup> In point of fact less than fifteen percent of German voters support that party, which is the only German national party that is emphatically critical of immigration. Further, the AfD’s support lies disproportionately in Eastern regions of the country which were under Soviet control. A nationwide poll in Germany in June 2019 revealed that the party regarded as the best suited to solve political and social problems was the pro-immigration, outspokenly antifascist Greens (*die Grünen*). While the AfD received no more than four percent support from those answering questions about Germany’s desired future, the Greens registered as high as twenty-seven percent in a multiparty system.<sup>38</sup>

A sympathetic commentator Benedikt Kaiser has stated that the poor showing by the AfD in a regional election in Hamburg in February, 2020, in which the party won only 5.3 percent of

the vote,<sup>39</sup> was a deserved “rejection” for a party that failed to campaign adequately. Although a long-awaited “lurch toward the Right (*Rechtsrutsch*)” among the affluent never took place, it may still be possible, according to Kaiser, for the AfD to capture the support of the working class, particularly in areas that have been impacted by Third World immigration.<sup>40</sup> In Hamburg’s deteriorating neighborhoods, the AfD captured 20% or more of the registered vote. But even so, why should we believe the cordon sanitaire against Kaiser’s party would come down if its candidates won 20% of the vote throughout Germany? More likely that situation would lead to an increased mobilization among administrators and the media against a looming fascist danger.

The German response to a supposed fascist threat is so extreme that understanding it may require us to consider the country’s growing preoccupation with the Nazi past. By now that past has been made to embrace almost the entire course of German history, as our section on penitential historiography tries to show. We are also dealing here with an internalized consciousness, according to two post-World War Two antifascist critics Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, and Franco-German journalist Géraldine Schwarz.<sup>41</sup> Antifascist authors, particularly the ones writing from and about Germany, treat the ideology they oppose as a suppressed impulse and a buried memory from the Nazi-fascist era. Continuing external control is therefore needed in order to keep the fascist mentality from repossessing European societies. A German federal agency has been tasked with “political education” in German schools, (die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung); and in accordance with the wishes of antifascist critics, it maintains an appropriate public awareness of German guilt for the nation’s fascist past, while focusing on the dangers to German democratic institutions supposedly coming overwhelmingly from the nationalist Right.<sup>31</sup>

The German novelist Uwe Tellkamp, who grew up in Dresden in Communist East Germany, has noted the overlaps and differences between Communist antifascism and the kind of antifascism that now reigns in the German Federal Republic. Although both forms of antifascism relentlessly target freedom of thought, Communist dictatorships operate in a less complicated manner. They feature authoritarian governments that intimidate their critics through physical force or professional ostracism. The liberal democratic form of antifascism is physically less brutal but also more insidious. It takes over people's lives internally until swallows up "civil society."<sup>42</sup> Through ever tightening control of cultural and educational institutions, liberal democratic antifascism in Germany may have become unstoppable. It is perpetually at war with a never-defeated fascist enemy, which the instigators look for in resistance to the neverending antifascist campaign. And rather than raising questions about this crazed project, universities, churches, and the mass media all rush to participate.

A closer look at populist parties in Western Europe may allow us to judge the disproportion between their electoral strength and the fear they arouse. We might also consider whether the resonance generated by these parties confirms Natalia Antonova's lament in The Guardian that "[f]rom Britain to Ukraine, the far right is thriving on shared emotion."<sup>43</sup> We need not raise the question of whether European journalists and administrators are correct in their equation of populism with fascism or Nazism. Rather let us turn to the electoral and governing potential of the Right that is under fire from the antifascist establishment. Although the share may be occasionally higher, populist parties in Belgium and Holland typically garner about fifteen percent of the votes. No matter what percentage of the votes these parties gain, their opponents on the left carefully block them from entering coalitions. In France the Rassemblement National and its predecessor the Front National have managed to send only one

delegate to the National Assembly since the Front's founding in 1972. Although France's populist Right has entered the second round of elections, the parties of the Left and Center have predictably united to keep its candidates from winning electoral districts. In French presidential runoffs, the Left and Center have cooperated to keep the French populist candidate, most recently Marine Le Pen, from rising above a fixed percentage in the low thirties.

In Austria a leader of the right populist Austrian Freedom Party, Heinz Christian Strache, was able to enter a coalition with the centrist People's Party, after his party had won 25.97 % of the vote in an Austrian national election in September 2017. But when the media revealed that Strache, who was then Austrian Vice Chancellor, was entangled in a financial scandal, support for his Party plummeted to about 16.17% by September 2019. Thereafter the Austrian Freedom Party was back in exile.<sup>44</sup> The populist Swedish Democrats have constituted the third largest party in the multiparty Riksdag since 2015, and their share of the vote has generally ranged from 12% to 15%. Not surprisingly, the ruling parties have kept the Swedish Democrats out of cabinets. Although the data herein cited may go back a few years, the electoral and demographic trends and exclusionary practices they describe are not likely to change any time soon.

The Anglo-American world would seem to represent an exception to this quarantining of the populist Right that has taken place in other Western societies. A closer look at this apparent exception, however, suggests the deviation is not as great as one might first think. Boris Johnson's landslide victory as Tory leader in the parliamentary election of December 2019 was a dream-come-true for the 52% of the British electorate who in June 2016 voted to leave the European Union. A bit of research would uncover that it was not the Tories but the United Kingdom Independence Party that had carried the torch for British independence from the EU since 1993. In 2015 this anti-EU party managed to elect deputies to the National Assembly of

Wales and placed its members on municipal councils throughout England. But party officials could do nothing to change England's "first through the gate" electoral system, which provides the Conservatives and Labour with a near monopoly of seats in the House of Commons and near exclusive power to form governments. Even in 2015 when UKIP attracted 3.8 million votes, it landed up with only two seats in the Commons, while its party head, Nigel Farage, lost his own district. It was only after a Brexit champion, Boris Johnson, could gain control of the Tories' party machinery that England's departure from the EU would be earnestly pursued.

The question that might be asked however is whether Johnson's successes represent a clear victory for the populist Right. One can easily believe that a lackluster image and an accommodation of the anti-Semitic Left by Johnson's opponent Jeremy Corbyn contributed to Labour's recent electoral disaster. There were also other issues beside delayed implementation of Brexit and the opposition of England's globalist elites, which added to Johnson's favorable position. Part of Johnson's attraction for British voters may have been his willingness to fit in with a progressive culture. During his campaign he conspicuously invoked the ideal of diversity<sup>45</sup> and enthusiastically endorsed gay marriage<sup>46</sup> and other social positions associated with the Left. Descriptions of Johnson in the American conservative press as a leader who combines social conservatism with economic populism is greatly overstated.<sup>47</sup> Nearer to the truth, Johnson may be the closest to an electable candidate that the political Right can field in our present Anglo-American society.

But this qualified statement is different from portraying Johnson as the standard-bearer of the social Right. Although hardly a favorite of the globalist establishment, Johnson promotes an exceedingly modest populist agenda. For it is certainly that by comparison to the more robust populism that one finds in Eastern Europe or even in the Rassemblement National in France.



Johnson's populism is limited to statements of determination to leave the EU in the name of national sovereignty and to taking occasional swipes against illegal immigration.<sup>48</sup> The English Prime Minister may be close ideologically to Geert Wilders, the head of Holland's Party for Freedom. A socially progressive critic of Muslim immigration who defends Zionism, feminism, and gay rights, Wilders mixes his criticism of Third World immigration with views that would play well among most American establishment Democrats. One would never confuse him or Johnson on social issues with more traditionalist populists such as Victor Orban, Matteo Salvini, or (perhaps?) Vladimir Putin.

#### <A>Successful Populists?

Populists have generally made the deepest inroads in Eastern and East Central Europe, in a region that has been only minimally impacted by multicultural, antifascist ideology. It is also a region that has not been heavily affected by racial minorities or Muslim immigrants. Curiously, the inroads that populists have made in Eastern and East Central Europe, excluding from consideration here Germanophone Austria given its supposedly ominous German character, have not attracted the critical attention that has been conferred on Germany or even France as a hotbed of fascism and neo-Nazism. This is noteworthy in view of the warnings from Western policy experts and political journalists about the imminent resurgence of right-wing authoritarianism in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet empire. Flora Lewis at the New York Times and the political scientist Charles Gati<sup>49</sup> were conspicuous among those who conjured up Doppelgänger of Admiral Miklos Horthy in Hungary and General Josef Pilsudski in Poland who would seize power after the Soviet armies went home. The specter of German fascism seemed less alarming back then than were these dire predictions about Eastern Europe, although

nationalist parties well to the right of the AfD were then winning votes in Germany. Perhaps the Germanophobia of Germany's ruling class and the Western media and the greater cultural distance of certain European countries from Western journalists, have caused even minimal evidence of German nationalism to arouse more antifascist panic than the rise of nationalist parties in East Central Europe.

Certain exceptions may be warranted here, for example, the attacks leveled on Orban's nationalist government in Hungary, and Putin's Russia. Polish nationalism has received coverage in the news mostly because its ruling Law and Justice Party ran afoul of the demands for reparations by certain Jewish organizations. But Poland's truly right-wing nationalist Confederation Party's winning seats in the Sejm (Polish parliament),<sup>50</sup> has elicited nothing like the response to the far more centrist AfD. The dread of Germany, as the source of Nazism, clearly some prospects look far scarier than watching the antifascist Left yield ground in Eastern Europe.

There is however little reason to think that populist successes in Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia can be transferred to Western Europe or Canada. It would also be a mistake to read too much into Donald Trump's 2016 electoral victory in the US. Although Trump appealed as a candidate to the forgotten worker and to opponents of mass immigration, once in office he did not carry out a particularly original agenda. His most controversial stands, trying to keep illegal immigrants from entering the US and restricting travel from countries with terrorist problems, recycled positions that the Democrats took in preceding decades. This includes the building of a border wall with Mexico, which in 2013 was a signature position of Congressional Democrats.

Trump, however, distinguished himself from more timid Republican heads of state by duking it out with media opponents and by working up his base at rallies, hurling insults at "the

fake media.” This has helped consolidate a constituency that shares Trump’s anti-elitism and vibrates to his mention of patriotic symbols. He also managed to improve the job prospects for racial minorities and college-educated women, before the response to COVID-19 wrought havoc on the American economy. But Trump’s party’s defeat in Congressional and other electoral races in 2018 reflected the natural limitations of his populist style.<sup>51</sup> A staid website, Business Insider, stated this opinion on August 20, 2017: “For the first time in our history a Nazi sympathizer occupies the White House.”<sup>52</sup> This judgment was supposedly based on Trump’s statements made in response to the Charlottesville demonstration on August 11, 2017, an imbroglio that did feature, among others, neo-Nazis. While there is no indication that Trump speaking at his press conference on August 15 praised Nazi demonstrators,<sup>53</sup> it is significant that the media could make it sound as if he did.

We might wish to reflect on such facts as we consider whether the populists are gaining ground in Western countries. Antifascist activist Géraldine Schwarz complains that “far-right parties want to downplay Nazi crimes as a first step towards reawakening ideas from that era,” and the notion has become prevalent in the West that “hierarchy can be drawn among humans according to their race or their religion.”<sup>54</sup> Ms. Schwarz is clearly looking at a very different political landscape than the one some of us see. The liberal democratic establishment shows remarkable durability, even when it takes controversial social and cultural stands. And this establishment’s stability results from its proven power to mold opinion, through its control of vital institutions.

Matteo Salvini’s Lega Nord,<sup>55</sup> which at the time of this writing claims 32% of the Italian electorate, and the emerging Partido Vox in Spain provide examples of national populism that have gained solid footholds in Mediterranean countries. Not surprisingly, that ultimate

establishmentarian Macron has worked to isolate Salvini as a “far rightist,”<sup>56</sup> and the Spanish media have labeled Vox as unprecedentedly “far right.”<sup>57</sup> These fits of populist fervor may in fact be peculiar to Latin countries, areas with unstable economic conditions and traditionally masculine cultures.

The same political tendencies are not as strong in countries that reveal more fiscal stability and well-established public administration. Populism hits a very low wall in countries that feature a behaviorally predictable political majority, winner-take-all electoral rules and an entrenched two-party system. Sizeable numbers of minorities and the presence of Third World immigrant populations will further limit the growth potential of populist movements. In any case, Salvini was ousted from his premiership by leftist coalition partners. This shake-up occurred after steady media attacks against the contaminating populist, or fascist, presence in Italy. Both the French and German governments helped topple the government that Salvini led and promised his successor large loans, in return for taking African refugees and Muslim migrants from the Middle East. In August 2019 the Vatican spoke out emphatically against Salvini and against those who vote for “*souverainisme*” (sovereignty) in Italy and elsewhere in the West, as enemies of Catholic compassion and social justice. The idea that Catholic nationalists and populists could depend on an alliance with the Catholic Church, (French, Italian, Polish, and Brazilian populists had identified with it strongly) has now been laid to rest, pending new, unexpected developments.<sup>58</sup>

Not surprisingly charges of wishing to return Italy to a latter-day equivalent of Mussolini’s fascist government have bedeviled Salvini’s political career, particularly since this young politician became a key player in Italian government. A rally that Salvini held in Rome on October 19, 2019, was likened by Europe’s establishment press to Mussolini’s March on Rome

in October 1922. To all such charges, Salvini ripostes by pointing out that although he is “proud to be called a populist,” he is most definitely not a fascist. Terms like “fascist, Communist, Left and Right and particularly how the media have chosen to throw them about,” observes Salvini, “belong to a different era and have been dead for years.”<sup>59</sup> Salvini may be right but is not likely to convince critics who have a deep emotional and professional investment in keeping alive associations that he rejects as obsolete. His political opponents maintain that “he struts around with the air of Mussolini.”<sup>60</sup>

Would-be populist politicians will meet another obstacle besides being called fascists in countries that lack strong ethnic roots, and which are characterized by a pluralistic, fluid population. Attempts to build populist politics in the US around human rights propositions or a cult of democracy, as some well-financed Americans hope to do, may be an exercise in futility.<sup>61</sup> One needs far better glue for holding together a populist movement. Beliefs that all people “are created equal” and that everyone in the US should speak English may not be enough to sustain such a force. “The mystical chords of memory” to which Lincoln appealed as a source of American togetherness may now be as frayed as they were on the eve of the American Civil War.

Those in power will not necessarily remain there indefinitely. They will likely face challenges, and indeed some of their troubles could arise from their recent successes. The continued influx of uneducated immigrants from the Third World and many with low job skills, the increasing costs of social programs, the tensions created by multicultural politics, and the seething dissatisfaction of what the French call “peripheral populations” all spell long-term difficulties for the ruling classes.<sup>62</sup> But there is no reason to believe the establishment is collapsing before a populist adversary. Contrary to the hope of French populists grouped around

“Les Identitaires,” the populist phenomenon that has arisen in France and in other Western countries may be only a current, not the “tidal wave (*raz de marée*)” being conjured up.<sup>63</sup> One may finally doubt whether antifascist polemicists are addressing a real crisis when they rush to defend those still in control.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x6wj2ea>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.europe1.fr/emissions/L-edito-international/edito-le-fascisme-italien-sest-regenere-sous-la-forme-du-populisme-3878930>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/vladimir-putin-fascist-325534>

<sup>4</sup> <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/inside-track-is-putins-russia-fascist-1888>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/cols/will090414.php3>

<sup>6</sup> See my article <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/if-loving-putin-is-right-i-want-to-be-wrong/>

<sup>7</sup> See The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.uctv.tv/shows/Growing-Activism-Labor-Community-Strategy-Center-12261>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/oeffentlichkeitsarbeit/vortraege/rede-p-haldenwang-20190513-bfv-symposium-2019>; see also Günter Scholdt, “So geht totalitär,” Freilich 105

(August 2019), 88-91. A work that is written with deep patriotic concern and tries to make sense of the passivity of the German public in the face of their continuing self-degradation as a people is Thorsten Hinz’s Die Psychologie der deutschen Niederlage: Über die deutsche Mentalität (Berlin: Antaios, 2016)

<sup>10</sup> An academic who seems shocked by the recent intensification of the war against “pluralistic democracy in German universities, Andreas Rödder, express his concern in comments in the

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Neue Zürcher Zeitung (November 4, 2019). What makes these comments particularly striking is the author's obvious sympathy for the Rainbow Coalition before it turned in his view "repressive."

<https://outlook.office365.com/mail/inbox/id/AAMkADE0MzIxYjljLWQxMzItNGM4Mi04NDNjLWQyNTA2MjRmMmFiOABGAAAAAADlv5zYKTrTEblAAJAnhcETBwCLNUWAcinTEbk2AJAnhcETAAAAAhi3AADlGergcROuRLE9NWVoVUWPAAEgAI76AAA%3D>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.tagesschau.de/multimedia/video/video-496129.html>

<sup>12</sup> A particularly egregious example of the efforts to marginalize the AfD was the dismissal of an official associated with the Ministry of Culture in Hesse for eating with an AfD member. The Green feminist Minister of Culture was outraged by this happening.

<https://www.tichyseinblick.de/daily-es-sentials/chef-der-filmfoerderung-gefeuert-wegen-mittagessens-mit-dem-afd-vorsitzenden/>.

<sup>13</sup> Alice Weidel, Widerworte: Gedanken über Deutschland (Kulmbach: Börsen Verlag, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> <https://fr.sputniknews.com/france/201812071039207383-france-bhl-gilets-jaunes-levy-macron/>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-08/french\\_fractures\\_2018.pdf](https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-08/french_fractures_2018.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2mO42uvlMg>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.thelocal.fr/20160823/immigration-negative-for-france-majority-says>

<sup>18</sup> Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, National Populism and the Revolt against Liberal Democracy (London: Penguin/Random House, 2018), 3-39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 43-48, 57-63.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/mar/26/tory-mp-criticised-for-using-antisemitic-term-cultural-marxism>

<sup>21</sup> For a defense of this term in a very mainstream Republican website, see Dominic Green's article, mostly in praise of Jordan Peterson, in American Spectator, <https://spectator.us/whats-wrong-cultural-marxism/>. Peterson, William Lind and at one time this author favored the use of the term "cultural Marxist" but already in The Strange Death of Marxism (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2005) and even more explicitly in Fascism: Career of a Concept (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016) I began to avoid a phrase that I considered misleading. The reason was certainly not the one offered by the Board of Deputies of British Jews. It just seemed confusing to refer to positions that are clearly not classical Marxist ones as something they're not. An article in Daily Kos (January 23, 2019) presented my position tersely and accurately. <https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2019/1/23/1828527/-How-the-cultural-Marxism-hoax-began-and-why-it-s-spreading-into-the-mainstream>. See also my attempt to dissociate myself from the term "cultural Marxist" in American Thinker: [https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/01/the\\_frankfurt\\_school\\_and\\_cultural\\_marxism.html](https://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2018/01/the_frankfurt_school_and_cultural_marxism.html).

<sup>22</sup> The term "cultural Marxist" was first popularized in the US by the self-described Marxist Troy Schroyer. See for example Troyer's The Critique of Domination: The Origin and Development of Critical Theory (New York: Braziller, 1973).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/washington-secrets/cesar-chavez-elevated-to-anti-illegal-immigration-hero>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/barbara-c-jordan>.

<sup>25</sup> See Georges Marchais's editorial comment in L'Humanité, January 6, 1981.



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<sup>26</sup> Georges Cogniot, *Réalité de la nation, l'attrape-nigaud du cosmopolitisme* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1950)

<sup>27</sup> See Ulla Plener's biography of the post-World War Two chairman of the German Socialist Party Kurt Schumacher (1895-1952). A Socialist reformer, who spent World War Two in a Nazi concentration camp, Schumacher was also a passionate German patriot. To the consternation of the American occupying forces, he tried to negotiate with the Soviets in order to establish a neutral but unified Germany.

<sup>28</sup> National Populism, xxi-xxv.

<sup>29</sup> <https://visegradpost.com/en/2020/02/03/gyula-thurmer-with-kadar-gone-soros-arrived/>

<sup>30</sup> [https://index.hu/belfold/2019/05/19/thurmer\\_gyula\\_munkaspart\\_interju\\_ep-valasztas\\_2019/](https://index.hu/belfold/2019/05/19/thurmer_gyula_munkaspart_interju_ep-valasztas_2019/)

<sup>31</sup> National Populism, 284-92; and Markus Wagner's "positive Bilanz" of his party's achievements in 2018 given at the new year's reception for the AfD in January, 2019: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpak1pHJxgE>.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpak1pHJxgE> This is a recording of the upbeat speech that Wagner delivered at the New Year's reception of the AfD. A variation on this view of reconciliation between warring ideological sides comes from the Göttingen sociologist Wolfgang Sofsky, who sees the growing size of the administrative state as an incentive to extreme parties to moderate their positions. Sofsky's aphorism is "Ämter überdauern Inhaber," "positions outlast their occupants," a situation that forces ideological partisans into "a liberal consensus" for professional advancement. See Wolfgang Sofsky, "Das Volk schaut nur zu," Neue Zürcher Zeitung, February 20, 2019

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.bvoltaire.fr/alain-de-benoist-il-y-aura-un-avant-et-un-apres-gilets-jaunes/>

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<sup>34</sup> Thilo Sarrazin, Deutschland schafft sich ab (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2010) and Feindliche Übernahme: Wie die Immigration den Fortschritt behindert und die Gesellschaft behindert (Berlin: FinanzBuch, 2018); and Laurent Obertone, La France Interdite (Paris: Editions Ring, 2018), especially 51-77. For a revealing look at German crime figures since the arrival of the migrants, see <https://www.tichyseinblick.de/daily-essentials/bundeskriminalamt-mit-anderem-bild-zur-zuwanderungskriminalitaet-als-bundesinnenminister/>

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Le Figaro, June 13, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> See Jérôme Fourquet, L'Archipel français: Naissance d'une nation multiple et divisée (Paris: Seuil, 2019). Fourquet's book challenges the conventional populist wisdom as expressed by Patrick Buisson and François Bousquet both advisers to the Le Pen family and to the RN. For a commentary with a similar point of view, see my opinion-piece <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-populist-right-is-less-popular-than-you-think/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.wsocv.com/news/world/german-intel-deems/ALZBAWAY4OTGLJULKGJQNI3R5Y/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend-1671.html>

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/wahl-in-hamburg/wahl-in-hamburg-afd-und-wohl-auch-die-fdp-in-buergerschaft-16648163.html>

<sup>40</sup> See Benedikt Kaiser, "Der Weg der AfD," Neue Ordnung, 1.20, 11-15

<sup>41</sup> See Alexander and Margerete Mitscherlich, Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2009); Géraldine Schwarz, Les Amnésiaques (Paris: Flammarion, 2019)

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/themen/der-schriftsteller-uwe-tellkamp-ist-ein-afd-sympathisant-15485914.html>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/discussion/p/87zcd>

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.bpb.de/>

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=heinz+christian+strache&view=detail&mid=BE5B8EB0A81E420069B3BE5B8EB0A81E420069B3&FORM=VIRE>

<sup>45</sup> According to the pro-Conservative Telegraph, the best thing about Johnson's diversity is that he practices it without even having to acknowledge it.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/07/25/best-thing-boris-johnsons-diverse-cabinet-diversity-irrelevant/>

<sup>46</sup> On Johnson's effusive, widely announced support for gay marriage, see also the Telegraph: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/london-mayor-election/9488094/Boris-Johnson-let-same-sex-couples-enjoy-the-happy-state-of-marriage.html>

<sup>47</sup> See for example this syndicated column by Frank Buckley, a prominent pro-Trump commentator. <https://nypost.com/2019/12/16/boris-johnson-donald-trumps-secret-to-success-take-best-from-right-left/>

<sup>48</sup> See the examination of what is called "stripped down populism" in my book After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 112-31.

<sup>49</sup> <https://www.nationalreview.com/2012/03/crusade-against-hungary-marion-smith/> ; Charles Gati, Hungary and the Soviet Bloc (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986)

<sup>50</sup> See "A New Right Arises in Poland" by Michael Krupa in Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture (February 2020) 44.2, 42-44

<sup>51</sup> On Trump's continued lack of public acceptance and his poor showing in polls against prospective Democratic rivals, see these figures from Real Clear Politics:

[https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/latest\\_polls/](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/latest_polls/).

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<sup>52</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-is-a-nazi-sympathizer-2017-8>

<sup>53</sup> [https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2019/03/21/trump\\_didnt\\_call\\_neo-nazis\\_fine\\_people\\_heres\\_proof\\_139815.html](https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2019/03/21/trump_didnt_call_neo-nazis_fine_people_heres_proof_139815.html)

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/profile/geraldine-schwarz>

<sup>55</sup> A work that shows Salvini's skills as a populist leader, who turned a regional party into a national force within a few years, is Marie d'Armagnac's Matteo Salvini: Indiscipline (Paris: L'artilleur, 2019)

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/d4a20574-2af4-11e9-a5ab-ff8ef2b976c7>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/16/world/europe/spain-elections-vox-far-right.html>; The Spanish website Magnet has described Vox as a party which in its xenophobia and racism has never before existed in Spain. Apparently the webmasters forgot about what Spain was like before the 1980s, and particularly under the Franco regime. Magnet also seem to believe that unlike rightist, authoritarian regimes, for example in the US, "Spanish parties until now have operated entirely within the constitutional order." There is of course no evidence that Vox or the winners in the American presidential election in 2016 violated this order.

<https://magnet.xataka.com/en-diez-minutos/que-piensa-que-propone-realmente-programa-vox-para-espana>.

<sup>58</sup> <https://katholisches.info/2019/08/19/die-allianz-mit-dem-vatikan-gegen-matteo-salvini/>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/salvini-fascismo-unidea-morta-1770386.html>

<sup>60</sup> [https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/ne-pas-se-laisser-duper-par-salvini-19-10-2019-2342193\\_24.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/monde/ne-pas-se-laisser-duper-par-salvini-19-10-2019-2342193_24.php)

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/american-and-european-populists-are-talking-past-each-other/> A revealing symposium published in the pro-Trump website American

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Mind suggests reasons that populism may have no real future in the US. The participants address the question of whether American nationalism is morally permissible given the country's history of racial injustice. The group concludes this appeal is defensible, providing those "magnificent phrases" in the Declaration of Independence about all men being created equal can be made into the basis for American identity. This universalist proposition is then held up as a counterpoint to the Left, which is condemned for practicing identitarian politics.

<https://americanmind.org/audio/populism-and-identity-politics/>. See also

<https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-new-nationalism-wont-save-the-right/>.

<sup>62</sup> In 2016 The Atlantic published a penetrating essay on the abandonment of the non-urban working class at the beginning of the century by the Democratic Party, as it pursued leftist identitarian politics, in alliance with large corporations:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/10/how-democrats-killed-their-populist-soul/504710/>.

<sup>63</sup><https://outlook.office365.com/mail/inbox/id/AAMkADE0MzIxYjljLWQxMzItNGM4Mi04NDNjLWQyNTA2MjRm>

## Chapter Six: The Uses and Abuses of Conservative Antifascism

Antifascist polemics have played a critical role in media conservative discourse. These polemics typically recycle the other side's arguments to make them fit the needs of establishment conservatives and the Republican Party. According to this account, the Democratic Party swarms with fascists, while the Republican Party is fighting for equality and human rights. Widely acclaimed conservative antifascists would include journalists Jonah Goldberg, Dennis Prager, and filmmaker Dinesh D'Souza. Although none of these celebrities has more than a nodding acquaintance with their subject, they do provide their base with a steady supply of campaign slogans.

Exemplifying media conservative antifascism is Jonah Goldberg's bestseller Liberal Fascism, which claims that the other national party has been historically linked to fascism. Goldberg, a nationally syndicated Republican columnist, focuses on the putative parallels between the rhetoric of Mussolini and Hitler and the proposals of 2016 Democratic presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton. Because Hillary Clinton favored extensive social programs that resembled those advocated by interwar fascists, this supposedly reveals a connection between fascism and the Democratic Party. Hillary's references to a new "village" under government auspices was really a throwback to Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft.<sup>1</sup> And the Democratic Party's endorsement of affirmative action programs for minorities and women is supposedly the modern equivalent Hitler's exclusion of Jews from German public life under the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. Goldberg's reproduction at the end of his book of the 1920 Nazi Party Platform in translation is intended to point out that the Democratic Party of 2008, even before Barack Obama arrived on the national scene, was on its way to replicating the politics of the Third Reich.

When Goldberg comes to enunciating antifascist principle, he gives us the following advice: “The role of the state should be limited and its meddling should be seen as an exception.”<sup>2</sup> While there is nothing wrong with this maxim in theory, the devil of course is in the details. How exactly do we decide what is meddling and what is a proper form of state intervention? In Goldberg’s case this question is a no-brainer. Every social and anti-discriminatory program that was passed up until 2008 (when his book was published) was fine, providing the GOP as well as the other party signed off on it. Accordingly, Goldberg disapproved of presidential candidate Rand Paul questioning the existence of a Department of Education or the public accommodations provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Yet Goldberg also has a problem with far more moderate steps undertaken by Woodrow Wilson and FDR to erect a modern welfare state.<sup>3</sup>

Goldberg’s work may serve a model for other Republicans who make it their business to address the fascist problem. Republican talk show host Dennis Prager has produced commentaries on the fascist peril for his Prager University. Based on his sketch of neo-Hegelian Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944), Prager’s guest Dinesh D’Souza opines that “fascists are socialists with a national identity.” D’Souza notes that “[t]he Left has vastly expanded state control over the private sector” and concludes that “fascism bears a deep kinship to the ideology of today’s Left.”<sup>4</sup> The logic is that any thinker, regime, or movement that has advocated an expansion of the state exemplifies both fascism and “today’s Left.”

As scholars are in agreement in pointing out, Gentile quite consciously rejected Marxism and Marxist socialism in favor of a philosophy of will that later merged with fascist theory.<sup>5</sup> Gentile’s understanding of the fascist, organic state has nothing to do with D’Souza’s and Prager’s “Left.” Rather it is an hierarchical structure that emanates from the will of the leader

acting on behalf of a unified nation. Although an antifascist like Timothy Snyder who goes after Trump as the new Hitler or Mussolini may be sullyng his scholarly reputations, Republican antifascists usually have no scholarly reputation to compromise. They are political operatives trying to solicit votes for their party.

Even more illustrative of these partisan antifascist efforts are the films and commentaries of D'Souza, who attempts to prove the fascist history of the Democratic Party. Toward this end D'Souza pieced together an entire book, The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the Left, that should demonstrate that the Democratic Party, which incorporates the Left, exudes fascist and Nazi tendencies.<sup>6</sup> In an interview with the Breitbart website, D'Souza explains that the Left since the election of Obama is driven by "the glimpse of being able to establish exactly what the fascists always wanted: a complete centralized state." He also sounds this warning: "Remember, for example, that with the NSA today there are surveillance technologies that were completely unavailable to Mussolini in the '20s or Hitler in the '30s. So in a sense, true fascism, full-scale fascism, is more possible today than it was in the twentieth century."<sup>7</sup> Again one has to ask: whether any progress toward centralized state power necessarily represents a movement in the direction of fascism. The consolidation of state power has been going on for a long time in many places. It seems unlikely that all such developments betray the influence of a unitary fascist ideology.

A libertarian author David Ramsay Steele, who usually constructs arguments with meticulous care, takes a position in his article "The Mystery of Fascism" that mirrors the perspective of Republicans like D'Souza. According to Steele: "Most of the world's people in the second half of the twentieth century were ruled by governments which were closer in practice to Fascism than they were either to liberalism or to Marxist-Leninism." The fact that



governments that are neither liberal (in whatever sense Steele is employing that term) nor explicitly Marxist hardly proves they are “Fascist.” It means they are neither “liberal” nor Marxist.<sup>8</sup> Nor does the fact that welfare state governments exist internationally show any kinship to the fascist internationalism that some fascist theorists like Asvero Gravelli tried to launch in the early 1930s.

Welfare state or social democratic governments exist internationally for multiple reasons. Among these reasons are the growth of modern administrative states, a universal franchise, popular demand for social programs, and the breakdown of older communal and familial arrangements, a trend that has been accelerated by the reach and socializing functions of modern welfare states. But there is nothing peculiarly fascist about these developments, even if fascists like other governing elites tried to provide for social needs within a centralized administrative state. Because interwar Italy, England, the US, and the Soviets all practiced some form of economic collectivism does not prove they were all politically the same—or even less plausibly, “fascist.” An equally questionable attribution of fascism to one’s enemies on the left can be found in Dennis Prager’s monitory statement: “if there is a real fascist threat to America, it comes from the left whose appetite for state power is essentially unlimited.”<sup>9</sup> Were fascists the only political actors who have craved “state power”? If this were the case all political leaders who have displayed an appetite for unlimited power throughout history would have to be classified as fascists.

Equally questionable is the notion that governments become fascist when they reach a certain tipping point in their acquisition of power or in their appropriation of GNP from the private sector. Although we may agree that giving the state unlimited power is detrimental to freedom, this is not the same as saying that to do so is to become fascist. The post-World War

Two Labour governments in England nationalized industries on a scale that went beyond anything that had been tried in fascist Italy between 1922 and 1943. Between 1945 and 1951 the Labour government of Clement Attlee nationalized one-fifth of the British economy.<sup>10</sup> Yet this fact does not mean that England by 1951 became more of a fascist state than Italy was in 1930. In England, the growth of state power proceeded from leftist, egalitarian, and at least implicitly internationalist premises; in Fascist Italy, the state appealed to hierarchy and revolutionary nationalist principles as it claimed to speak for all Italians. Noting that difference entails not a value judgment but an attempt to draw distinctions between unlike entities.

One further example of the antifascism of the current conservative establishment is the anti-Putin editorializing of James Kirchik. This conservative controversialist, who has been featured in The Washington Examiner, National Review, and The Weekly Standard, has published numerous commentaries linking Vladimir Putin and his government to the far Right. Kirchik points out that the Russian leader has not even tried to accommodate Russia's growing and now vocal LGBTQ community. Putin is inflexibly biased, we are told, in favor of traditional heterosexual relations.<sup>11</sup> Despite Kirchik's stated concern about the unbounded Right in Europe, he denies Nazism is making a comeback in the US. Trump's election "it owes itself at least partly to white racial resentment." But Kirchik finds no evidence that Trump is a Nazi and assures us that "there is no mass fascist political movement in America."<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, according to Kirchik, Trump's style of rule has engendered an antifascist movement and angry reactions from his opponents. American intellectuals, he tells us, "rightly see Trump as a blight on the American polity." Kirchik artfully evades this question: What would prevent the same forces that are now blasting the "Nazi" Trump from doing the same to

other politicians who displeased them? To his credit, Kirchik does not pretend that fascism is a leftist disease. He is quite happy in his political comments to locate it on the right.

Current conservative journalists dealing with this subject typically associate fascism with the interwar European Right, even if they opportunistically claim to be finding it in the Democratic Party as well. By contrast, the small-government interwar American Right was not particularly sensitized to a fascist danger. This was the case even if we exclude from consideration an interwar Catholic Right, which like the interwar American Left was attracted however selectively to Mussolini's regime. Most of the establishment Right in the interwar period dismissed fascist ideas as European nonsense that we should simply stay away from. It was not so much denounced as a contagious moral evil as regarded as a European New Deal on steroids. At most European fascism and even German Nazism furnished a warning of what we could become if the New Deal were expanded. Interwar opponents of the welfare state, J.T. Flynn, Alfred J. Nock, and Garet Garrett viewed European fascists as the pathbreakers of what they dreaded as the coming American socialism. They hazarded the opinion that FDR's labor legislation looked like an American imitation of Mussolini's Carta del Lavoro of 1927.<sup>13</sup>

This analysis, although not very deep, was not entirely false. The interwar Right was describing the modern administrative state that came to control increasingly the economy and civic life in Western countries from the Progressive Era onward. But this political development has gone forward in some places less dramatically than in others; and it has occurred in different places under diverse auspices. An egalitarian, universalist version of the welfare state will differ significantly from a revolutionary nationalist one. It is these ideological and cultural distinctions that the interwar American Right (which in many ways embodies a classical liberal tradition) neglected to analyze sufficiently.

The older Right was driven by a desire to hold on to an older America and by a revulsion for the half-truths or outright lies that were spread in order to push the country into the “War to End All Wars.” Albert J. Nock acquired fame as a controversialist in exposing how the US was drawn into war against Imperial Germany. His Myth of a Guilty Nation, which was published in book form in 1922, had come out earlier as separate articles in the magazine The Freeman.<sup>14</sup> These essays excoriated the government of Woodrow Wilson for embroiling the US in a needless military adventure. Nock’s articles also warned against taking sides in the postwar quarrels that resulted from the Treaty of Versailles. Clearly fascism was not a burning issue for Nock, who when Mussolini took the island of Corfu in 1923 insisted that it was not really America’s business who owned that island. By having brought about an unconditional victory for the Allied side, he also observed, the American government opened the door to all kinds of mischief. Thus it had enabled French president Poincaré to carry out his geopolitical ambitions by “looting the Ruhr and setting up his Napoleonic scheme of military hegemony in Europe.”<sup>15</sup> The war also “fortified a universal faith in violence.” But the proper political response for the American government to what it had helped unloose would be, according to Nock, a “disinterested response,” rather than new military entanglements.<sup>16</sup>

Nock, Flynn, and others who deplored American foreign adventures associated fascism with what displeased them about a changing American society. These unwelcome changes included the vast expansion of state power and the waging of foreign wars. The current conservative establishment has generally accepted the former and vigorously promoted the latter. It also has extended the F-word to “isolationists” and to those who have tried to cut back public administration beyond what the GOP advisers find acceptable or expedient. The conservative movement may even exceed the Left in the recklessness of its antifascist condemnations, e.g.

when William Bennett attacked Pat Buchanan in 1995 for his immigration stand, as someone who was “flirting with fascism.”<sup>17</sup> The neoconservative culture magazine New Criterion, moreover, went after the evil of “microfascism” which it applied to women who claimed “the right to triumph over the natural consequences of their sexual behavior by removing the natural burden of their unwanted children.”<sup>18</sup>

Unlike the PC Left, our present antifascist conservatives are not even able to situate fascism on a consistent political spectrum, because for them fascism has been reduced to an all-purpose insult. “Fascist” does however assume a more specific historical meaning for the conservative movement’s Zionist sponsors. For them it signifies a policy that is not viewed as being in Israel’s interest. In this case “fascist” may be treated as synonymous with “anti-Semitic.” The longtime crusade waged by media conservatives against “Islamofascism” makes sense as an attempt to accommodate Jewish patrons of the conservative media who are concerned with the anti-Israeli positions of Muslim and anti-Zionist journalists and militants. Conservative activist David Horowitz has combatted fascism in its allegedly Islamic form by setting aside special weeks to protest this recrudescence of an interwar evil<sup>19</sup> Horowitz and others at his Freedom Center have linked Islamic anti-Zionism to Muslim units that served in the Waffen SS and equally to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who during World War Two had been a guest of Hitler’s in Berlin.

Unlike media conservatism, which unceremoniously manipulates the F word, an older conservatism that took shape after the Second World War often ignored fascism as a powerful historical force. George Nash’s voluminous study, The American Intellectual Conservative Movement since 1945 (which in its second edition reaches into the 1990s) includes no references to fascism, and only three fleeting ones to Nazism in the course of describing political

conversions during the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, much of Nash's book is taken up with the subject of conservative anti-Communism, and that for good reason. Fighting Communism was as much a fixation for the American Right throughout the Cold War, as exposing anti-Semitism is for Jewish civic organizations. Another reason for this apparent lack of interest was the care that the conservative movement took in the 1950s and 1960s to distance itself from any fascist association. This became an urgent necessity during the presidential campaign of Barry Goldwater in 1964, when a strongly anticommunist Republican candidate was routinely identified in the media and by celebrities like Martin Luther King as a Nazi. Although a totally unfounded charge, it did elicit among self-described conservatives a fear of any contact with fascism, perhaps to the point of refusing to talk about an unpleasant subject.

The post-War conservative movement assumed a critique of fascism, but did not articulate it, at least not in isolation from its view of larger ideological currents. Its paradigm for understanding adversary forces is found in Origins of Totalitarianism, a widely read work published after World War Two by the German émigré scholar Hannah Arendt (1906-1975). Like Arendt, American conservatives assumed the grimmest political and spiritual problem in the modern West was totalitarianism. This manifested itself in both German Nazism and Soviet communism, particularly in its Stalinist phase. According to Arendt, certain peculiarly modern circumstances gave rise to bullying, aggressive regimes that systematically degraded their subjects and which featured a cult of the leader surrounded by "the party."<sup>21</sup> Arendt examined this new, terrifying regime from a secular historical perspective, looking at such developments as the more and more sophisticated means for controlling subjects available to modern centralized states, the dehumanizing effects of nineteenth century colonialism, the carnage of the First World War, anti-Semitism as a unifying ideology, and an impersonal mass society.

Conservative intellectuals during the Cold War fused their analysis of a totalitarian danger with detailed discussions of a spiritual crisis. An entire field of metaphysical speculation flourished around the reasons that twentieth century societies succumbed to totalitarian ideologies. Concepts like “second reality,” “immanentizing the Eschaton,” and the recurrent “gnostic heresy” became subjects for detailed treatment in National Review, Modern Age, and other conservative publications of the period. Perhaps most fundamental for elucidating the appeal of totalitarian movements, particularly Communism, was the historical theorizing of Eric Voegelin (1901-1985), who treated modern ideologies as a religious heresy rooted in the dualistic end-times beliefs of the ancient Gnostics.

Although himself hardly a man of the far Right and someone who seemed far more traumatized by Nazism than Communism, Voegelin became perhaps the most revered historical thinker for the anti-Communist Right by the 1960s. It may not have hurt Voegelin’s reputation that although far from an orthodox Christian and an explicit Neo-Platonist, he was both sympathetic to the Catholic Church and openly hostile to Protestantism and the Protestant Reformation.<sup>22</sup> His religious sympathies harmonized with a view that was then prevalent on the American right that the Church was a bulwark against Marxism. Voegelin’s speculative work was particularly compelling for former Communist Frank Meyer, who later became a staunch anti-Communist. Like other recovered Communists of his age, Meyer took a step that Voegelin never did by joining the Catholic Church.<sup>23</sup>

#### <A>Why There Are Few Conservative Critiques of Fascism

Today’s conservative celebrities go along with the Left’s identification of fascism with prejudice and discrimination even if they also apply the branding iron to the Democratic Party. Two

explanations may be considered in illuminating this shared perspective. One, the conservative establishment is too beleaguered or outnumbered by media opposition to try to apply the fascist label in a truer historical sense. As in Rilke's aphorism, they may be signaling to us "Wer spricht von Siegen? Überstehn ist alles! [Who speaks of victories? Enduring is everything!]" Two, established conservatives who enjoy a media presence believe many of the same things about fascism as those on the left. Little separates their perceptions of what fascism is about. Fascists, as seen through the lenses of conservative media as well as through those of their more leftist media associates, are white racists, anti-Semites, and others who should exist outside of acceptable political discourse. Establishment conservatives have worked to exclude these undesirables from polite conversation, although some media conservatives, for example, Ben Shapiro have held back from calling for "de-platforming" them. In the face of Antifa demonstrations American conservatives have evidenced little will to resist. Indeed, the Federalist Society's New York correspondent David Marcus has charged his fellow conservatives with abetting the statue-smashing, vandalizing Left by rushing to accommodate its demands. Marcus's thoughts are up front in the title of a newspaper commentary: "Conservative Cowards are to Blame for Falling Statues."<sup>24</sup>

In any case, one searches in vain among current American conservative celebrities for a systematic understanding of how fascism develops other than as a malign force that is attributed to prejudice or else, more opportunistically, to one's Democratic opponents. This superficiality stands in contrast to how interwar Marxists examined fascism in a socio-economic context. It is also markedly different from how historians like Ernst Nolte and Stanley Payne situate fascist movements within the framework of interwar European struggles or distinguish between fascism and other movements of the Right. A far-ranging literature on fascism by serious scholars



already exists, but its impact on our political class and journalists has yet to be seen. A conclusion to which we are therefore drawn is that American conservatism, even in its earlier and more cerebral stage, has never considered fascism very deeply. It has either seized on that term as a cudgel with which to beat its opposition or else absorbed whatever definition was then prevalent on the Center Left. The rise of media conservatism has just added vulgarity and opportunism to this problem of neglect.

Can we speak, however, of a distinctively “conservative antifascism”? We can if we limit our examples to two cases: libertarian critics of fascist statism and European traditionalists. Neither group is simply imitating the Left’s conception of fascism and throwing it back at the other side. Both consider fascism to be an essentially leftist movement and build arguments around that contention. One noteworthy illustration is the Irish libertarian philosopher Gerald Casey, who authored a thousand-page work Freedom’s Progress? A History of Political Thought.<sup>25</sup> Casey has emphatically rejected the argument that fascism was a movement of the Right, by which is meant the interwar revolutionary Right. He maintains that some historians pay too much attention to fascism’s exaltation of hierarchy and particularity, to the neglect of its war against liberty. Casey emphasizes especially fascism’s call for a collectivized economy, which he associates with the socialist Left. Everything else about Italian fascism was subordinate to its statism and economic collectivism, which were evidence of its origin on the Left.

Much of this critical discussion of fascism from a free market liberal perspective is not entirely new and reprises arguments developed by the Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises in the 1930s. What may distinguish recent criticism of fascism from a European liberal (or old liberal) position of the type represented by Mises is the treatment of fascism as distinctly leftist by virtue of its collectivist character. Whereas Mises and others of his generation treated the

conflict between themselves and collectivist ideologies as one between liberalism and illiberalism, more recent criticisms from a libertarian or small-government perspective treat fascism as a movement of the Left, similar in nature to socialism and Communism. Casey and others who criticize fascism as a leftist movement from a libertarian perspective are now standing in this newer interpretive tradition.

The European traditionalist and monarchist, Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddhin (1909-1990), famously placed the Nazis in a line of descent issuing from the French Revolution. An Austrian aristocrat who was profoundly critical of late modernity, Kuehnelt-Leddhin presented both Hitler and the Communists as the offspring of Robespierre and the French Jacobins.<sup>26</sup> Kuehnelt-Leddhin documents his contention with a wealth of evidence, starting from the premise that most changes in regimes, particularly revolutionary ones, since the early twentieth century have come from the Left. This is not a perspective that will likely resonate in our late modern society. Kuehnelt-Leddhin's critique is less about fascism than it is about political change that occurred outside of what the writer considered the gold age that prevailed before the First World War. A Hapsburg loyalist, he felt little sympathy for the politics of the century in which he happened to live.

Another example of an antifascism that we might locate loosely on the Right came from predominantly Catholic critics of German Nazism. This group included Jewish converts Hermann Broch, Alfred Döblin and Waldemar Gurian, and a onetime Nazi sympathizer Heimito von Doderer.<sup>27</sup> The novelist Franz Werfel never formally converted but was strongly attracted to the Church, and he too may be grouped together with Germanophone, mostly Austrian Catholic anti-Nazis, who lived during Hitler's coming to power. Common to this group, which consisted mostly of distinguished Austro-German literary figures (Gurian who was a Russian Jewish

émigré and a political theorist may be regarded as an exception), was a view of the Catholic Church as a counterforce to a dangerous neopagan age. A similar resistance to Nazi ideas from professing Christians took form among Protestants, although their resistance depended more heavily on individual conscience than any ecclesiastical institution as a bulwark against Nazi ideology.

Without underestimating the courage of these anti-Nazi Christians, whose resistance sometimes cost them their lives, it is hard to speak here of a well-developed theoretical critique of fascism. Rather we are referring to noble resistance to a particularly vicious modern form of tyranny and about the aid and comfort that these figures found in traditional Catholic or Protestant Christianity. The critical ideas about modernity presented by these figures were very much evident among later exponents of conservative anti-Communism. Warnings against neopagan and ideologically crazed Nazi totalitarianism were later typically adapted to the struggle against atheistic Communism. The Left also benefited, in a strange way, from the Christian anti-Nazism of an earlier period. Some of the Protestant opponents of the Nazi “state religion,” like Karl Barth and Ernst Niekisch, passionately defended Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, as an antidote to anti-Christian fascism.

None of these stances however represents a methodical assessment of a fascist enemy, in the same way that Karl Kautsky or Ludwig von Mises analyzed the Nazi dictatorship. Broch and von Doderer placed Nazism within a very wide historical and cultural framework, which for them was late modernity. They focused on the Nazi era as illustrating spiritual problems they believed would continue to plague modern Western societies after the Nazis had vanished. Their views about Nazism led beyond the period in which they lived and beyond the tyranny that they

examined. It is therefore problematic to treat their observations about the Nazis as being at the heart of their critical work.

Interestingly, Heimito von Doderer's epic novel Die Dämonen, which is set in Vienna in 1926 and 1927, is often seen as throwing light on how Nazism seduced socially and morally confused Viennese. Von Doderer's subjects are depicted as inhabiting "a second reality and dreaming of "changing the general situation because of their personal position." But one should not read too much into this gargantuan novel about a specifically Nazi temptation. Von Doderer (1896-1966) began writing Die Dämonen in 1931, continued his work as a Nazi party member and afterwards as a devout Catholic and finally finished it in the 1950s.<sup>28</sup> It was later quoted to illustrate how modern people were drawn into totalitarian movements, especially in the writings of Eric Voegelin and his disciple Gerhart Niemeyer.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the anti-Nazi Catholics and Protestants to whom reference has been made tell us little about the contemporary Right's treatment of fascism. There is little or no linkage between the two.

#### <A>Discussing the Dearth of Critical Thinking About Fascism One Last Time

We might pose then one last time the speculative question that has wound its way through this chapter: Why has there been so little systematic critical thought from the Right about fascism as an historical problem? We might engage this question by summarizing this chapter's findings.

The interwar American Right was mostly concerned with keeping the US out of foreign wars and limiting the growth of a centralized state. Its representatives had less interest in foreign political movements than they did in events closer to home. They lamented in European fascism what they thought was an advanced form of the growing "warfare-welfare state" that they were combating at home.

The post-World War Two American conservative movement focused more on containing Soviet and world Communism than it did on a fascist danger in the past. With due respect to its leftist critics, this movement was never pro-fascist or even soft on fascism. Rather its adherents were less eager to fight what they regarded as an interwar peril than they were in resisting Communist expansion. If this movement offered any critical response to fascism or Nazism, it came mostly through studies of totalitarianism like Hannah Arendt's analysis and Eric Voegelin's examination of modernity. The conservative movement that came along later and which is now mostly a media phenomenon, reveals a strong leftist imprint. It issued out of the moderate Left of the 1980s, when the neoconservatives ascended to a position of dominance in the establishment Right. When the present conservative movement speaks about fascism, it does so in phrases that originated on the antifascist Left. What renders this "conservative" antifascism different from its leftist model, however, is the use that it makes of it. It turns an essentially leftist antifascism against the Democratic Party, while occasionally linking fascism to a more advanced form of the welfare state than the one the Republicans defend.

A more authentic Right has not constructed a systematic critique of fascism for other reasons. Here we are referring to the contemporary European Right, which is populist and views itself as having arisen in a post-fascist epoch. One might be tempted to dismiss this stated lack of interest as a cover-up for the practice of taking fascist-like positions. According to their enemies, European right-wingers are trying to conceal the telltale origin of their politics, which is mired in the fascist past. What better way to do this than by pretending that fascism is now gone? One might strengthen this indictment by noting that the New Right in France, Italy, Spain, and elsewhere in Europe devoted magazine publications in the past to exonerating those associated with fascism and accused Nazi collaborators. It would therefore be inaccurate to state that there

is absolutely no connection between any European post-war Right and earlier fascist associations.<sup>30</sup>

The contemporary populist Right, however, only reveals such antecedents in a very distant way. The view propounded by Salvini when he announced that “il fascismo è un'idea morta,” that “fascism is a dead idea” is an eminently defensible position.<sup>31</sup> It may indeed be the case that the political reference points that marked interwar Europe are no longer relevant. There was a neofascist party organized by Giorgio Almirante, the Movimento Sociale Italiano in 1946, but by the time Almirante's protean party became Gianfranco Fini's Futuro e Libertà per l'Italia in 2010, there was little left of its original substance. The “post-fascist” party that followed the MSI as the Alleanza Nazionale in 1995 turned eventually into a run-of-the-mill center-right party,<sup>32</sup> when Fini became President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies in 2008. Those who keep looking for the fascist elements in Salvini's style, as French commentator Élisabeth Lévy has observed, are often “the orphans of Marxism in search of a substitute faith contributing significantly to the victory of globalist neoliberalism.”<sup>33</sup> It may also be the case that antifascist polemicists have vested interests in selectively adapting memories since they have built careers around charging their opponents with being fascists.

In any case, we might ask, what authorizes the antifascist Left to decide at what point fascism as a movement or mentality should come to an end? Are we supposed to believe that what Ernst Nolte called “the European civil war” of the 1930s goes on forever, or at least up until that moment when the antifascist Left decides to throw away the F-word? In a review of the movie “Dunkirk” for the New York Times, Manohla Dargatzis reminds us that “the fight against fascism continues.”<sup>34</sup>

Populists in France and Italy also insist in a more questionable way that “Right and Left no longer exist,” just like “fascism and Communism.” In other words, Right and Left as they operated as reference points in the 1930s are no longer relevant.<sup>35</sup> The confrontation between contending sides has changed, and the insurgents on the Right now present themselves as still identifiably cohesive nations who are battling a globalist capitalist class that has occupied vital institutions. A key point for European populists is that nations are not just “populations” but possess a “qualitative and not only quantitative character that took sometimes thousands of years to acquire.”<sup>36</sup> Those engaged in this struggle to preserve historical identities belong to the Right, inasmuch as they appeal to a national past, organic relations, and a principle of identity beyond the self-determining individual. But these populists have roots equally on the traditional left. They invoke working-class solidarity and oppose global, corporate capitalism. They also cultivate a blue-collar identity, even if that image does not always correspond to demographic reality.

Although Latin fascists and Nazis also attempted to attract a working-class base, the populists depend on that base much more heavily and, unlike the fascists, are not fighting interwar Marxism. Their enemies are corporate capitalism, Third World immigration, intersectional politics, and at least in Europe globalization as represented by American political and cultural control. Most continental European populist movements have absorbed leftist elements, including occasionally Marxist rhetoric. Although fascism once incorporated some of the same elements, the resulting mixture looked quite different. Fascist or fascistoid movements in Central and Eastern Europe often expressed such unpleasant traits as ferocious anti-Semitism and bellicosity, both of which seem to be absent from contemporary populism. The populists are therefore justified in wishing to turn the page while treating both fascism and Communism as

movements of the past. It is not they but the other side who have a deep investment, and not always for high-minded reasons, in structuring public discourse around the F word. Those on the populist Right, who wish to treat both fascism and Communism as movements of the past, may be urging the more sensible and better-grounded course.

A preoccupation with antifascism characterizes the political Left far more than the political Right. Although it may be possible to find genuine conservatives and religious traditionalists critically analyzing fascism, this activity has been far more common on the Left than the Right. Moreover, most of the conservative critics of fascism were more disturbed by Nazism than generic fascism, viewing the latter as a passing disruption. A typical response of the European Right to Mussolini's authoritarian regime in the interwar period was to regard it as a means of controlling leftist violence or else as a temporary interruption in the process of governing certain countries. Nazism by contrast aroused stronger opposition from traditional European liberals and conservatives. The view expressed by the conservative Lutheran, and disillusioned onetime Nazi sympathizer, Hermann Rauschning (1887-1982) that the Nazis were carrying out a "revolution of nihilism" was a widespread view among self-described conservatives during and after Hitler's rise to power.<sup>37</sup>

The American Right, or what has been conventionally designated as such, has reacted differently to fascism at different times. In the interwar period, the fascist movement did not arouse sustained interest among American critics of the New Deal, who wanted to stay out of foreign war. Fascists in power provided mostly a cautionary tale for the isolationist, anti-New Deal Right about where government overreach in the US might lead. The best way to fight fascism at home, it was contended, was to convince Americans to rein in their own corporate



state and command economy. For these opponents of expanding government, fascism was just one among other forms of “statism” whose leaders happened to speak Italian or German.

In the post-World War Two period, the discussion of a threatened freedom by those on the American right produced critiques of totalitarianism rather than fascism. Threats to liberty and Western civilization, from the standpoint of the post-World War Two Right, had come from the Nazis and Communists both; but since the defeat of the Third Reich, the remaining totalitarian danger was thought to issue from the Soviet empire and the spread of Communist ideology. For the present conservative fraternity, antifascism works as an attack strategy for countering the opposing party; and it functions by reprising mostly leftist descriptions of fascism. One should not read too much into what has become predictable, ritualized partisanship. Among the European populist Right a distancing from fascism has become essential for survival. The populists have been targeted throughout Western Europe as the successors of interwar fascists; and it is natural they should be working to dissociate themselves from this charge. They therefore insist that they are not ignoring fascism but treat it as an “object of study” that has reference to an earlier period. This obvious division between antifascists and populists may be the most critical one for studying current ideological polarities. All other political struggles in the Western world have become secondary.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jonah Goldberg, Liberal Fascism: The Secret History of the American Left, from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 317-57.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>3</sup> See my commentary on the takimag website detailing the inconsistencies in Goldberg’s polemic, “Jonah Goldberg: A Comfortable Conservative in the Belly of the Beast,”

[http://takimag.com/article/Jonah\\_goldberg\\_a\\_comfotable\\_conservative\\_in\\_the\\_belly\\_of\\_the\\_beast/print#axzz21XfT0j2W](http://takimag.com/article/Jonah_goldberg_a_comfotable_conservative_in_the_belly_of_the_beast/print#axzz21XfT0j2W).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.prageru.com/press-release/prageru-and-dinesh-d'souza-unearth-the-leftist-roots-of-fascism/> ; <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/right-wing-celebrities-play-fast-and-loose-with-history/>; <https://www.prageru.com/video/is-fascism-right-or-left/>

<sup>5</sup> See A. James Gregor, Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publisher, 2001), 101-04; Augusto del Noce, Giovanni Gentile: Per una interpretazione filosofica della storia contemporanea (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 288-92; and H.S. Harris, The Social Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1960), 290-334.

<sup>6</sup> Dinesh D'Souza, The Big Lie: Exposing the Nazi Roots of the American Left (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/breitbart/breitbart-news-daily-dinesh-dsouza-august-31-2018>

<sup>8</sup> As intellectual historian David Gordon observed in a note to me (26 November, 2019) after reading Steele's judgment: "Saying something is closer to something else doesn't mean it's the same as what it's presumably closer to."

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nationalreview.com/2013/08/tolerance-health-and-fascism-dennis-prager/>

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[http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/attlee\\_clement.shtml#:~:text=N%C2%9D%19%1D%0FP%C3%9B%19\[Y\[%C2%9DL%C2%8C%10\]%1D%1B%19YIL%C2%90%C3%89L%C2%8C%0CNMLL%C2%8CP%C3%8C%C2%89PNIL%C2%8C%10\]%1D%1B%19YIL%C2%8C%1D%C3%98%C3%89L%C2%8C%1D%1A%19IL%C2%8C%10%C2%9C%C2%9A\]%1A%C3%9A%0B%1D%1A%19IL%C2%8C%10%C2%9C%C2%9A\]%1A%C3%9AL%C2%8C%19X%C3%9B%C3%9B%C2%9B%C3%9B^IL%C2%90%C3%89L%C2%8C%18\[%C2%99L%C2%8C%19%C3%9C%C2%98\[%C2%9D%19YL%C2%8C%1A\[%C2%99%19%19\[%C2%99%19\[%C2%98%C3%99IL%C2%8C%1D%1B%C3%89L%C2%8C%12\[%C2%99%1AXK](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/attlee_clement.shtml#:~:text=N%C2%9D%19%1D%0FP%C3%9B%19[Y[%C2%9DL%C2%8C%10]%1D%1B%19YIL%C2%90%C3%89L%C2%8C%0CNMLL%C2%8CP%C3%8C%C2%89PNIL%C2%8C%10]%1D%1B%19YIL%C2%8C%1D%C3%98%C3%89L%C2%8C%1D%1A%19IL%C2%8C%10%C2%9C%C2%9A]%1A%C3%9A%0B%1D%1A%19IL%C2%8C%10%C2%9C%C2%9A]%1A%C3%9AL%C2%8C%19X%C3%9B%C3%9B%C2%9B%C3%9B^IL%C2%90%C3%89L%C2%8C%18[%C2%99L%C2%8C%19%C3%9C%C2%98[%C2%9D%19YL%C2%8C%1A[%C2%99%19%19[%C2%99%19[%C2%98%C3%99IL%C2%8C%1D%1B%C3%89L%C2%8C%12[%C2%99%1AXK)

<sup>11</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/01/03/why-putins-defense-of-traditional-values-is-really-a-war-on-freedom/> ; <https://www.weeklystandard.com/author/james-kirchick>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/248926/everybody-hates-nazis>

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<sup>13</sup> See John T. Flynn, As We Go Marching, paperback edition (Auburn AL: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007); and Justin Raimondo, Reclaiming the American Right: The Lost Legacy of the Conservative Movement, second edition (Wilmington DE: ISI Books, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Albert J. Nock, Myth of a Guilty Nation, reissued (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> See Albert Jay Nock, The State of the Union: Essays in Social Criticism, editor Charles H. Hamilton (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 89-90.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 91; 76-88 passim.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/07/10/us/ex-rival-accuses-buchanan-of-flirting-with-fascism.html>

<sup>18</sup> <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2011/10/getting-used-to-the-f-word>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2007/10/ac-bowen/david-horowitz-awareness-week-islamo-fascism-comes-to-columbia/>

<sup>20</sup> See George H. Nash, The Conservative Intellectual Movement since 1945, expanded edition (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt brace Jovanovich, 1973).

<sup>22</sup> See Eric Voegelin, the New Science of Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952); and Eric Voegelin, Science, Politics and Gnosticism, trans. by William J. Fitzpatrick (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>23</sup> The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945; and Patrick Allitt, Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985 (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> <https://thefederalist.com/2020/06/20/conservative-cowards-are-to-blame-for-falling-statues/>

<sup>25</sup> See Gerald Casey, Freedom's Progress? A History of Political Thought (New York: Imprint Books, 2017); and the podcast with Tom Woods "What Is Fascism?" (August 20, 2019) <https://tomwoods.com/ep-1474-what-is-fascism/>

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<sup>26</sup> See Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, Leftism Revisited: From de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Pol Pot, revised edition ( Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1991) and The Left from de Sade and Marx to Hitler and Marcuse (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1974).

<sup>27</sup> See Hermann Broch, Modernismus, Kulturkrise und Hitlerzeit (London: Institute of German Studies, 1994); Alfred Döblin, Judentum und Katholizismus ( Berlin: Duncker& Humblot, 2010); Waldemar Gurian, Totalitarianism as Political Religion ( New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1964).

<sup>28</sup> See Heimito von Doderer, Die Dämonen, ( Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1985),  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Heimito-von-Doderer>

<sup>29</sup> A collection of essays that discusses most of these Christian critics of Nazism and the problem of a despiritualized modernity from a sympathetic perspective is Eric Voegelin, Hitler and the Germans (Columbia, Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 1999); see also

<https://theimaginativeconservative.org/2020/03/discerning-spirits-gerhart-niemeyer-culture-critic-gregory-wolfe.html>

<sup>30</sup> See for example Pierre-André Taguieff, “L’identité française et ses ennemis: le traitement de l’immigration dans le racisme français contemporain,” L’homme et la société 77-78 (December 1985); Michel Winock, “Les flambées du nationalisme français,” L’Histoire 73 (December 1984), 11-25; Jean-Paul Honoré “ Jean-Marie Le Pen et le Front National,” Les temps modernes 41 ( April 1985), 1843-7; and [https://www.lepoint.fr/editos-du-point/nicolas-baverez/nicolas-baverez-matteo-salvini-la-longue-marche-du-capitano-25-01-2020-2359558\\_73.php](https://www.lepoint.fr/editos-du-point/nicolas-baverez/nicolas-baverez-matteo-salvini-la-longue-marche-du-capitano-25-01-2020-2359558_73.php)

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.open.online/2019/10/17/salvini-intervista-fiume-per-la-rivista-francese-le-point-il-fascismo-e-unidea-morta/> ; Salvini famously added to this observation that “although dead and not likely to return, like Communism, fascism is worth studying (*un fenomeno da studiare*).”

<sup>32</sup> See Marco Tarchhi, Cinquant’anni di nostalgia: La destra italiana dopo il fascismo (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995)

<sup>33</sup> Élisabeth Lévy, Les maîtres censeurs (Paris: Jean Claude Lattes, 2002), 158.

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/20/movies/dunkirk-review-christopher-nolan.html>

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<sup>35</sup> See Arnaud Imatz, Droite/gauche pour sortir de equivoque (Paris: Perre-Guillaume de Roux, 2016), 120-173.

<sup>36</sup> See Jean-Luc Coronel de Boissezon, “Le questionnement populiste de la démocratie,” Cahiers de L’Issep, 13-24; and Dictionnaire des populisme, ed. Christophe Boutin, Olivier Dard, Frédéric Rouvillois (Paris: Cerf, 2019).

<sup>37</sup> See Hermann Rauschnig, The Revolution of Nihilism (London: William Heinemann, 1939) and perhaps of less interest by the same author Masken und Metamorphosen des Nihilismus (Frankfurt am Main and Vienna: Humboldt Verlag, 1954).

## Chapter Seven: The Antifascist State

We begin this chapter by tracing how the antifascist regime evolved and what distinguishes it from other forms of government. Although antifascist regimes rarely describe themselves as such, the post-World War Two German government came close to taking this step when it defined itself in its Basic Law as a “militant democracy (Streitbare Demokratie).”<sup>1</sup> Whether “antifascist” is applied to such a regime, what is being designated is a political society that consciously acts in relation to a transformative design. Aristotle famously argued in the first book of the Politics that the polis was the model toward which the Greeks tend to move as a people because of their ethnic and cultural characteristics. Supposedly only the Greeks were able to achieve this ideal of governing themselves as citizens.<sup>2</sup> Aristotle was indicating a path the Greeks would likely have taken without social planners forcing them to act against their nature (*para phusin*).

The English political theorist Michael Oakeshott contrasted governments that operate according to legal procedure to its pernicious, goal-driven opposite. The antithesis of nomocracy, according to Oakeshott, is “telocracy,” which treats government as a means toward realizing a collective visionary end. Oakeshott also describes telocratic collectivists as “rationalists” since they believe that human beings can be shaped according to their designs, without regard for personal freedom. According to his exponent Timothy Fuller, Oakeshott aims his criticism at those who “insist on ideologies or technocratic schemes of social engineering to guide the decisions of political life, overriding the practical sense of affairs to be found in experienced politicians.”<sup>3</sup>

Although it would be difficult to imagine this distinction fully operating outside of Oakeshott's classical liberal frame of reference, and although one might wonder who these experienced politicians are who are immune to social engineers, it should be apparent that some states are more deeply motivated by ideology than other ones. The modern liberal democratic form of government has an end at least partly determined by what it does not want to be. Just as the Greeks, according to Aristotle, sought to avoid the snares of Persian despotism and just as the Hebrews were told by the God of the Old Testament not to be like the Egyptians, so too are liberal democratic citizens exhorted not to be fascists. Modern democracies are to be constantly on guard against fascism, and their perhaps unnamed telos is to combat this danger, partly by seeking to act and think in a way that clearly distinguishes democracy from what it opposes. While the average citizen may not always grasp this telos, social engineers in and outside the media do.

The exercise of state power as a means of combating a presumed fascist danger goes back in the US into the 1930s. The struggle against Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in the Second World War saw an expanded use of governmental power to deal with an external fascist and Nazi threat. Means were also taken at that time to suppress domestic forces that were viewed as allied to foreign fascist enemies; and politically promoted indoctrination occurred, especially in the Anglo-American world, to protect the antifascist side mentally and morally against contamination by its adversary. A harbinger of things to come in the US can be discerned in a widely read essay by Columbia University professor Karl Loewenstein in 1937, "Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, II." Here Loewenstein calls for a government that dedicates itself with total commitment to fighting democracy's greatest enemy: "In order definitely to overcome the danger of Europe's going wholly fascist, it would be necessary to remove the

causes, that is, to change the mental structure of this age of the masses and of rationalized emotion... Emotional government in one form or another must have its way until mastered by new psycho-technical methods which regularize the fluctuations between rationalism and mysticism.”<sup>4</sup>

One can easily locate in Loewenstein’s writing the blueprint that others would follow in mounting crusades against fascist sentiments. This crusade would include and be inspired by educator-philosopher John Dewey and his followers and then in an even more significant way, by the fathers of the Frankfurt school, particularly those theorists who sojourned in the US and left disciples behind. These figures, and social psychologists and public administrators who were influenced by them helped create here and in countries that followed in our footsteps a form of democratic government characterized by extensive social engineering. Although fascism has not been the only evil that therapeutic government has battled against, implicit in the war against prejudice and discrimination has been a continuing concern with its resurgence. During the Cold War, attention was called to a “red fascist” danger, which combined Soviet features with stereotypes that date back to the struggle against Nazism. American leftists complained with some justification that the government and anti-Communist politicians and journalists could not bring up the Soviets without comparing their government to the Third Reich. This may have been due not so much to anti-Communist hysteria as it was to the image of fascism or Hitler as the ever-present, ultimate evil. As soon as the Soviet Union came apart, American culture and educational elites went back to older preoccupations with a fascist peril.

By then antifascism had become an ideological pillar of the Western-style democratic administrative regime. Whether or not fascism was always designated as the ultimate foe, Western governments are now taking social and educational measures to combat what Jason



Stanley calls “performative fascism.”<sup>5</sup> A certain time perspective may be useful for understanding this historical situation.

The democratic administrative regime did not come into existence to fight fascism; and this was even less true of earlier states. Older forms of governments were not concerned with fighting discrimination and least of all with ensuring equality of esteem among subjects or citizens. Constitutional republics and monarchies in the past treated the moral attitudes and family relations in civil society as lying outside their purview, that is, unless those arrangements threatened the state’s authority. The fact that we are speaking here about the modern state as a welfare state tells us little about what kind of welfare state now prevails in the Western world.

Welfare state regimes in the past served a wide range of ideologies, nationalist, fascist, Christian et cetera. The present welfare state, to whatever extent it reveals a distinctive character, speaks for humankind, and engages in an ongoing struggle against national particularity and traditional forms of social discrimination. It follows this course at least partly to avoid being “fascist.” Although the political model under consideration is a subgenus of the Left, it is not directly derived from Marxism or Communism. It is leftist because of its egalitarian, globalist vision and because especially in Europe it targets fascism as a rightist enemy. Although this kind of regime seeks to expand its economic control, it is also working steadily toward cultural and social transformation. In this concern with psychic reconditioning those who shape our political culture resemble Frankfurt school intellectuals. Although Critical Theorists were technically economic Marxists, they were primarily concerned with combating fascism as the source of the prejudices they identified.

A dedication to socialism or Marxism does not seem to be true for all antifascists. Current progressives have formed alliances with large corporations, and antifascists have readily

participated in building a global economy based on interlocking capitalist enterprises.<sup>6</sup> There is of course an anti-globalist wing of the antifascist Left, which was present in the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations, and in European anti-globalization protests have been going on among antifascists for decades. But this manifestation of anti-globalism is mostly limited to the economic sphere.

Jason Stanley reminds us that nationalism (read Western nationalism) is “at the core of fascism.” Fascist ideology stresses “group identity,” which “can be variously based—on skin color, on religion, on tradition, on ethnic origin.” That hardly leaves much space for the survival of particularities, at least not in Western countries.<sup>7</sup>

An even more interesting attempt to combine anti-globalist socialism with the total globalization of the West can be found in Empire, a bestselling work by Italian Marxist (and co-organizer of the Red Brigade), Antonio Negri and Duke University English professor Michael Hardt. The authors of this work foresee a happy future in which Third World populations swallow up a capitalist, imperialist West and manage to repopulate it. Once this happens, Third World socialists will be given the opportunity to reorganize Western economies for the benefit of the onetime exploited.<sup>8</sup> They will also be able to enrich the West with their own values and habits.

In August 2019 the French and German centrist governments of Macron and Merkel pulled out all stops to unseat Salvini’s anti-immigration coalition.<sup>9</sup> The French and German heads of state then tried to induce by means of generous loans the successor government to Salvini’s to accept African migrants. Although this kind of activity has definite economic implications, it was not intended to advance Marxist socialism or abolish corporate capitalism. (And corporate capitalists have stood behind these immigration policies from which they profit.)

This is happening, for among other reasons, because the elites themselves are dedicated to a transformational social vision. When former British Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that he exaggerated the economic benefits of his immigration policy as a cosmopolitan idealist, the Western media and his former colleagues were not at all troubled by this revelation.<sup>10</sup>

Whether antifascists are corporate capitalists or socialist protesters, we may attribute to them a closely related cultural agenda for the transformation of Western countries. Their common denominator is less socialism than the cultural reconstruction of Western societies for the purpose of fighting fascism. This hardly replicates the efforts of an older Left to restrict immigration to protect indigenous work forces and, when expedient, to appeal to national particularities.

#### <A>The Fascist State: A Study in Contrasts

Since those with antifascist politics fear a new fascist state, perhaps we should look at what antifascists would have found particularly terrible about real, self-described fascist governments. The generic fascist state as represented by the interwar Italian regime and by those outside of Italy who tried to adapt its ideas glorified the state as a living organism. The German Jewish philosopher Ernst Cassirer applied the term “statolatry” to characterize regimes that teach veneration of the state. Cassirer unmistakably had in mind Italian fascism when he coined that usage.<sup>11</sup> Further, his term would have applied to Italian fascism far more than the German Nazi regime. The latter was too violent and murderous to fit easily into the revolutionary nationalist model of fascism constructed by such scholars as Stanley Payne and Renzo di Felice. And Carl Schmitt was undoubtedly right when in 1934 he pointed out that in contrast to the Italian fascist glorification of the state, the Nazi regime prioritized the “Volk” in its new order.<sup>12</sup> But given the

nature of the Nazi dictatorship, even the “Volk,” or whatever the Nazis defined as such, would become cannon fodder in Hitler’s wars of conquest and domestic bloodbaths.

A lucid and learned discussion of the fascist conception of the state can be found in the entry to the 1931 edition of the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences by the German scholar Erwin von Beckerath. Four years earlier Beckerath had published a longer treatment of the same subject in Das Wesen und Werden des faschistischen Staates, which has been periodically reissued and which still stands as a model of dispassionate scholarship on a controversial subject.<sup>13</sup> Beckerath spent considerable time in fascist Italy and knew many of its political leaders, although he was an old-fashioned European liberal, who became a close friend of the post-World War Two German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard. According to Beckerath, “The idea of the sovereignty of the state is the very kernel of Fascist political and social theory. The contrast with the French Revolution as well as with the pluralistic conception of the state is apparent here.” Further, “[a]lthough groups associations between the state and the individual are recognized in the order created by the fascist national revolution, they are to be strictly subordinated to the interests of the state. This conception leaves no room for the notion or practice of class struggle, even if fascism was less emphatic in its insistence on the solidarity of capital and labor in the production process over and above their antagonism in the division of the social product.”<sup>14</sup>

Beckerath dwells on the way in which the Fascist Party has transformed the Italian state, “by cutting through the horizontal layers of society, which with the aid of the arbitrary state government holds it together like a clamp.” He considers the elaborately developed structure of state authority created by the architects of the fascist order. “Concentrations of authority and hierarchy of membership imply that all the reins of party activity come together eventually in the

hands of Mussolini. All nominations are traceable directly or indirectly to him and throughout the varied ramifications of the party machine, the will of the leaders as a general rule prevails over the component organs.”<sup>15</sup> Besides providing for command positions for party leaders, the revolutionary order enacted by Mussolini and his cohorts was hierarchical and corporative. National confederations and federations were created, which reached through ascending levels of control all the way up to the Duce. These corporate, vocational bodies also drew up lists of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies, which disseminated party teachings and directives. At the top of the legislative hierarchy and directly under Mussolini loomed the Fascist Grand Council, which advised the Duce and drafted legislation, such as the Work Charter (Carta del Lavoro), which set up the Italian corporatist economy in 1926.<sup>16</sup>

Despite its elitist, anti-individualist character, the fascist state nonetheless had links to the French Revolution and the Italian Risorgimento.<sup>17</sup> It drew on the Latin nationalist aspects of both but pushed the statist precondition for the achievement of Italian national unity and national expansion in an explicitly authoritarian direction. Giovanni Gentile, the most distinguished theorist of the fascist movement, placed in relief its revolutionary as well as nationalist origin. Gentile looked back to the democratic advocates of Italian unification in the nineteenth century, Giuseppe Maria Garibaldi (1807–1882) and Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), in finding progenitors for his movement. Although Beckerath stresses the elitist and neo-medieval elements in Italian fascism, which are certainly present in its genealogy, it is nonetheless possible to trace fascism’s development from earlier forms of European nationalism.

Essential to nineteenth-century nationalist movements was the quest for an independent state, which would become the protector of national identity. In the interwar period, Zev Jabotinsky, the Revisionist Zionist who wished to create a Jewish state on both sides of the

Jordan, insisted that a powerful state (*memlachi*) was foundational for the resurrection of the Jewish people.<sup>18</sup> An Eastern European, Jabotinsky was expressing the sentiment of other nationalists in his region, like Josef Pilsudski and Roman Dmowski in Poland.<sup>19</sup> Not surprisingly Jabotinsky and other non-socialist Zionists venerated Mussolini, until his defection to Nazi Germany and his partial accommodation of Hitler's anti-Semitic policies. Until then Jabotinsky regarded Italian fascism as a model for his own nationalist enterprise. Going back even earlier, it was the French Revolution that helped produce a modern French administrative state that other national movements would come to incorporate. In the order established by the Revolution the ancient provinces were divided into *départements*, which were placed under the authority of *préfets* subject to the central government in Paris.

Nationalism and statism have often marched together, but as Beckerath observes, it was the centrality ascribed to the state in Latin fascism that set it apart from earlier attempts to fuse political power with national identity. But this fusion was hardly original in its Italian interwar version. In the fascist efforts at building a party state, one might recognize an updating of the *état postiche*, the concept of double governance that originated with the French Revolution. The revolutionary reorganization of France's administration attempted to impose a new, artificial state upon an older one. In France, this move was prefigured by the centralizing initiatives that came from pre-revolutionary monarchs. In any case, the party state devised by the Italian fascists bore a noticeable resemblance to the French revolutionary model, even if party functionaries were substituted in the newer form for revolutionary administrators.

We might also ask whether Italian fascism included a wholesale rejection of the "liberal nationalism" of the nineteenth century. More likely, fascism incorporated without appropriate acknowledgements certain aspects of an older bourgeois nationalism while ostentatiously

throwing out others. The fascist movement and later, the fascist state stressed nationalist and irredentist themes while resting on broad support from the Italian middle class.<sup>20</sup> This does not mean that Italian nationalism was predestined to move in a fascist direction, but it does suggest that the contention that fascism was the opposite of liberal nationalism is not entirely true.

Fascism also exhibited traits that are also found in antifascist politics. Both have been post-liberal and have abandoned such nineteenth-century bourgeois values and attitudes as strict adherence to constitutional principles, academic and intellectual freedom, and a separation between political administration and the institutions of civil society. Both fascists and antifascists have displayed an ambiguous, not entirely consistent attitude toward a collectivist economy and vacillate between support for corporate capitalist interests and calls for state control of the economy. Both have likewise maintained a cynical and often hostile relationship to inherited Christian institutions. Each has drawn on a Christian legacy when necessary, to justify their positions, but has otherwise sought to marginalize what each has regarded as a cumbersome remnant of the past. The antifascist Left has scorned traditional Christian institutions, while the Italian fascist government, even after the Lateran Accords were concluded in 1929, remained on a collision course with the Church. The hectoring of Catholic youth and other organizations by the fascist authorities in the early 1930s indicated the unwillingness of Mussolini's government to allow the Catholic clergy to form a "state within a state."

More evident than these intersecting points, however, are the critical differences between the fascists and antifascists. Whereas the fascists built their base on a bourgeois foundation, however misleadingly they denounced liberal institutions, the present antifascism reveals a post-bourgeois and post-liberal character. It offers a counter-morality to traditional bourgeois Christian ethics and advocates for feminism, Third World immigration, and LGBTQT causes. The

question here is not whether these intersectional positions are defensible. Rather we are looking at the gulf between them and what the Western bourgeoisie believed about the social good up until recently.

One should be careful not to exaggerate the overlap between those financial groups that rallied to fascism and those that now align with self-described antifascist groups. Although in both cases one finds large corporate interests financing movements calling for change, the political-cultural attitudes motivating the two groups are clearly not the same. The General Confederation of Italian Industries (*Confindustria*), which in the interwar years worked to cooperate with the Italian fascist regime, was not exactly an ingathering of cultural radicals. It was anti-Communist, explicitly Italian nationalist, and held the social views of the age. Whatever might be said of the executive boards of Citibank, Coca Cola, and other large American corporations, it is foolish to equate groups in different ages that seem similar in terms of their relative wealth or degrees of economic dominance without considering critical cultural differences.

Perhaps even more important for distinguishing between fascist and antifascist political projects is where their advocates have stood on the ideological spectrum. While the intersectional, pro-immigration antifascists belong to the Left, interwar fascists revealed what were unmistakably rightwing characteristics. Generic fascism epitomized and in fact came to define a *revolutionary* Right. It was proudly elitist, mocked the aspiration toward universal equality, and exalted the particularistic, which it identified with its own nation.<sup>21</sup> When the Italian fascist government took sides in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, it sent troops to fight on the Nationalist side rather than with the Left. This does not mean that the fascists, in their Italian or Spanish Falange manifestation, did not have a socialist wing or call periodically for making



capitalists serve the interests of the nation. But such positions were hardly incompatible with the interwar Right, which was generally critical of both capitalism and individualism.

It may be helpful to look at fascism situationally to understand what made it a movement of the Right. Perhaps most significantly it opposed those principles that are inherent in the Left; and as a more traditional Right began to lose importance, with the decline of an aristocratic society, fascism became an improvised replacement. We should further consider the historical situation in which fascists found themselves and to which they were responding. Fascism prospered as a movement in what were economically second-world countries. Most of Italy's industrial growth occurred after the Second World War, not on Mussolini's watch.<sup>22</sup> The Duce's base of support was drawn largely from the traditional bourgeoisie, which rallied to organic nationalism as an alternative to leftist revolutionary threats. The fascist movement also provided a sense of cultural cohesion and a positive view of the Italian past, linked to a public appreciation of the glories of the Roman Empire. Its derivation from a Latin Catholic culture was also not incidental. The theory of a corporate economy that the fascists featured had its roots in neo-medieval and even older scholastic sources.

Fascism's incompatibility with the Anglosphere neoliberal conception of the Right tells us little about where it belongs ideologically. As a instantiation of the essentialist Right, fascism does not have to fit into an electoral spectrum that pertains to a later time and place.<sup>23</sup> One might even argue that given the social changes that have occurred in Western societies in the last fifty years, our present "center right" seems peculiar to late modern politics. Its practitioners and advocates generally accept most of what the social Left has accomplished since the 1960s while being eager to defend corporate capitalism and what they interpret as "human rights." Our present center Right is also committed to military intervention against "antidemocratic" countries

and occasionally interferes in Western countries that are thought to have moved too far away from our liberal democratic template. It is hard to see how this peculiarly American form of conservatism corresponds to what was considered the Right in interwar Europe.

The only perspective that may reveal shared interests is a Marxist one that treats both “Rights” with the context of an advanced capitalist economy. The coming together of Right and Left predicted by Christopher Lasch and other scholars decades ago may indeed have occurred, although consumer capitalism may not be the main glue, as Lasch contended, that holds this front together.<sup>24</sup> Although today’s antifascists are not unambiguously Marxist, in other ways they remain leftists. They are waging a war for equality against particularity, in any traditional Western sense. The coercion and suppression that will be required in the meantime to reach this goal may be compared to the dictatorship of the vanguard of the proletariat that was supposedly needed to bring about Marx’s socialist vision.<sup>25</sup>

In certain respects, the intersectional Left and its antifascism are far more radical than any Marxist Left that preceded it. Unlike a merely socialist Left, which seeks to change the dominant form of production and to redistribute earnings under a powerful state, the newer Left is bent on revolution. It can never allow the crusade against fascist prejudice to come to a halt, lest this stasis permits a Hitler, Mussolini, or Donald Trump to reverse prior reforms. It is also immoral and equally an invitation to fascism from this standpoint to treat any present moment as fixed, and no longer subject to progressive transformation. Trump in the US and the AfD in Germany are considered evil not because they wish to take us back to some distant past but because they refuse to carry the cultural revolution forward. Both are stuck in an earlier present, Trump somewhere at the beginning of the Obama administration, when the Democrats still favored large border walls and sending back illegal immigrants, and Alexander Gauland,

Nicholas Fest, and other onetime CDU pillars who are resisting the movement of their party toward the multicultural Left.

Although interwar fascism is no longer a real adversary for the antifascist Left, it nonetheless stands for what antifascists are seeking to transform. Antifascists insist they are resisting fascism in the name of “human rights” when they oppose the populist Right. This war for “tolerance” and humanity has also attracted considerable support from would-be moderates and upholders of the political status quo in Western countries. Recently deceased former French president Jacques Chirac worked energetically to separate his right-center RPR (Rassemblement pour la République) party from the National Front.<sup>26</sup> During Chirac’s presidential race in 2002, he loudly proclaimed his support for the culturally and socially leftist establishmentarian candidate Francois Hollande, against the Front’s candidate, Marine Le Pen. In Germany, the enemy on the “far Right” remains the only major political enemy. Germany’s centrist Christian Democrats would be ready to form a coalition with any party on the Left but condemns the AfD, which is now the country’s only significant right-of-center party, as fascistic. In both cases the ruling center has accepted the rules provided by antifascist activists about acceptable political associates and discourse.

#### <A>The Moralization of the Political

A key distinction between the fascist and antifascist concepts of the state concerns their differing ethical goals. Nothing justifies the belief that the Left is morally relativistic. (Being hateful toward the unconverted is another matter.) The antifascist Left is as morally driven as any past revolutionary cause dedicated to reconstructing humankind. The fact that its morality often contradicts traditional morality hardly proves that antifascists lack moral convictions. The aim of

bringing down what is seen as a fascist order replete with gross inequalities is profoundly moral in its intent. It may be the case that Antifa engages in nihilistic violence, but what lies behind the rioting is moral anger, and not in any sense the belief that all cultures are equal.

This view clashes with a core belief of American conservatives in the middle of the last century, which regarded “relativism” as an essential characteristic of the Left. The political theorist and onetime Yale professor Willmoore Kendall (1909-1967), who had been the teacher of William F. Buckley, was the best-known exponent of this position. According to an admirer Tom Woodlief, writing in The American Conservative, this “outcast Yale professor predicted 2020 better than his erstwhile colleagues.” Kendall had warned against “the suicidal pact with relativism,” which is allegedly what is now driving the antifascist Left. “Not speech that calls for dismantling the society’s institutional foundations or moral presuppositions, nor even speech that calls for spilling blood in the streets. No, the doyens of the suicidal society will instead feel an irresistible compulsion to silence the voices insisting that there is truth, even Truth, and that therefore many other beliefs are in error.”<sup>27</sup>

Antifascist activists may recognize the need for some people to speak “their truth,” as long as that does not include expressing opinions they deem to be fascist. This is a moral stand, hardly a relativistic one; and it is a political-existential one, in the sense in which Carl Schmitt understood “the Concept of the Political” as the most intensely antagonistic of human relationships.<sup>28</sup> It is unimaginable that what has become the more activist side in a culture war is not actuated by moral fervor, which expresses itself in righteous rage. In The Madness of Crowds Douglas Murray asks: “Are reciprocity and tolerance principles or fig-leaves? Do those who have been censored go on to censor others when the ability is in their own hands?”<sup>29</sup>

One may or may not be astonished when a popular journalist, Ezra Klein, justifies the statements made on Twitter by former New York Times writer Sarah Jeong, whose “jokes” included the phrase “#CancelWhitePeople.” According to Klein, Jeong’s tweets were not what they seemed to be. Supposedly Ms. Jeong was offering comments about the “dominant power structure and culture.”<sup>30</sup> Still, it would be a stretch to call it an act of antifascism when in 2015 Jeong announced on Twitter: “I was equating Trump to Hitler before it was cool.”<sup>31</sup>

Fascism did reject outright any politics of white male disparagement. Its advocates glorified virility and martial prowess and like the French Revolution, consigned women mostly to a distaff role. Mussolini’s Dottrina del Fascismo, published in 1931 and prepared with the assistance of Giovanni Gentile, stresses the virtues of masculinity and the spiritual unity of the historic nation. Without getting into the ambiguities of Ernst Nolte’s use of this phrase, we may describe fascism as an attempted “escape from transcendence.” Fascists were rejecting any effort to rise above what they understood as man’s essential nature, namely, being organically tied to an ancestral community and living as a creature of instinct and as someone who viewed life as a struggle against an ancient collective enemy. Instead of trying to remake humanity, in accordance with a plan for universal pacification and altruism, fascists called for allowing human nature to reassert itself.

This commitment was not exclusively rooted in the crude, murderous biologism of the Third Reich but could take a less murderous form in Latin fascism and its focus on Roman Neopaganism and the cult of the warrior. But in either case, according to Nolte, fascism rejected the project of refashioning people by extinguishing their authentic nature. This however leaves open the question of whether humans by their very nature fit the model ascribed to them by fascism. Certainly, the examples of transcendence that Nolte provides, from Christianity through

a succession of humanitarian projects, suggest that human nature may be more complex than the fascists assumed. Nolte is correct nonetheless to argue that fascists attempted to release energies and impulses that older Christian standards of behavior and later reformist social models tried to suppress or root out.

Another difference between the concepts of the state held by fascists and antifascists concerns their divergent sources of authority. Direction and rule in the Italian fascist state came from il Duce. The hierarchy of fascist doctrine pointed upward toward the fascist leader, who gave direction to the regime and who, in Carl Schmitt's phrase, "decided the challenge of the exception." The essence of fascism," a keen German observer, Oswald Spengler, noted in the early 1930s, was "not its party but rather the shape given to it by its creator. Mussolini was not a party leader but the head of his land. In all probability, his model, Lenin, would have filled the same role if he had lived long enough. Mussolini rules alone."<sup>32</sup> What Spengler calls a "perfected Caesarism," one in which "power is vested in a person not a party,"<sup>33</sup> was a distinguishing mark of Italian fascism and eventually of all interwar fascist movements. Whether we are speaking about the Spanish Falange, the British Union of Fascists, the Romanian Iron Guard, the French Parti Populaire Francais, or Julius Gombos's Party of National Unity in Hungary, all fascist movements favored a cult of the leader. The German Nazis likewise adopted this fascist hallmark, however much they mixed their fascism with other more sinister ingredients.

The antifascist state stands in contrast to the fascist one in the understanding of governance. In this way, the antifascist state involves sprawling administration, along with efforts to de-masculinize and de-ethnicize "populations," an expression favored by the German administrators of our time who do not want to be associated any longer with a "nation" or

“Volk.” The antifascist regime operates with forces dedicated to fighting “hate,” and mass media and public education.

Also, in contrast to the fascist state, which held plebiscitary events to affirm what the regime planned to do, the antifascist state holds elections between mostly indistinguishable candidates and parties. Leaders of the antifascist state can mold public opinion without having to resort to overly transparent manipulation, availing themselves of an international body of support consisting of multinational corporations, the mainstream media, and almost all public institutions in the West. Next to the sophisticated resources available to the antifascist state, the sight of Mussolini delivering a speech from Rome’s Palazzo Venezia seems bizarre and ancient.

Should a country elect a leader the antifascist state disavows, there are multiple ways of getting the word out. The fact that the antifascist Left of 2020 supported violence to hurry along its consolidation of power is not at all incompatible with the older system of control. Peaceful methods for shaping social conscience and behavior were pursued when other possibilities were not present. That situation has changed; and the managerial path to power has been replaced by a more direct and more riotous one.

#### <A>Antifascist Consistencies

If the fascist view would see identities as fixed, the antifascist would regard identities as variable options open to individual choice. Cases in the US dealing with the right to determine one’s gender have gone as far as the Supreme Court.<sup>34</sup> Campaigns for gender neutral bathrooms and related legislation have proceeded apace.<sup>35</sup> Corporate capitalists like Goldman Sachs are now “defining pronouns” for their employees (“Pronouns are words that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about them... Pronouns should not be assumed by someone’s

name or gender expression.”). This is fully consistent with how the antifascist Left understands human nature. It may be a sign of the time that critics of LGBTQ no less than supporters have reached for the F-word in describing the other side.<sup>36</sup> Given the present focus of antifascism, it is also reasonable that The Guardian should scold Hungarian Premier Orban for promoting a law that requires registering the new-born according to their birth genders.<sup>37</sup>

The idea that a critical attitude toward the feminist movement is by itself evidence of fascist sentiments has spread among American educators and journalists. In How Fascism Works, Jason Stanley tells us quite bluntly: “Fascist opposition to gender studies in particular flows from its patriarchal ideology. National Socialism targeted women’s movements and feminism generally; for the Nazis feminism was a Jewish conspiracy to destroy fertility among Aryan women.”<sup>38</sup> Stanley also quotes feminist Kate Manne, who confirms his view about the threatening misogyny that “faces women who are blamed when patriarchal expectations are left unfulfilled. The logic of fascist politics has a vivid model in Manne’s logic of misogyny.”<sup>39</sup> According to Stanley, the complaint issuing from unhappy men that quotas for women are harming their professional advancement betrays definite patriarchal and fascist prejudices.<sup>40</sup> In a less fascistically inclined society men would welcome these efforts to overcome sexism. There is no evidence however that Stanley has vacated his endowed chair at Yale in favor of a woman.

The British Feminist Antifascist Assembly, which held a mass rally in London in November 2018, on International Women’s Day, may have gone beyond Stanley in seeing fascist patriarchs everywhere. From the perspective of this group, the fascist, antifeminist evil has become so widespread and pervasive, as women continue to be ground down, that only the overthrow of the socioeconomic system can end the oppression. “We don’t want more women in



the boardrooms; we don't want to smash the glass ceiling. We want to destroy the boardroom and burn down the building.”<sup>41</sup>

Although it is possible to discern here traces of the Frankfurt School's critical study of patriarchy going back to the 1930s, certain differences are equally apparent. The detailed criticisms of patriarchy in Studien über Autorität und Familie (1936), for example, criticize the “unnatural” mentality of “self-subordination” among those who are lower in the family chain of command than the patriarch. Critical Theorists also attribute some of the psychic harm caused by this subordination to the effects of late capitalism and to the form of domination produced by this economy.<sup>42</sup> Nowhere do Adorno, Horkheimer, and other first-generation Critical Theorists demand the obliteration of gender distinctions, which like others of their generation they assumed were real and valid, as opposed to a social construct. While antifascist feminists are right when they claim to be drawing on older radical traditions, the first-generation Critical Theorists hoped to establish parity between the sexes within the family structure, however much they believed in social engineering and a socialist economy.

One finds the present degree of antifascist radicalization goes well beyond earlier efforts. On the cultural front, today's antifascists are radical in a way that begs for historical precedent.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bpb.de/politik/extremismus/rechtsextremismus/41891/streitbare-demokratie>; Hans Jürgen Papier and Wolfgang Durner, “Streitbare Demokratie,” Archiv des öffentlichen Rechts, 128.3 (2003), 340-71.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, Politica, Oxford Classical Text (Oxford, 1957), 252 b, 1-25.

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<sup>3</sup> See Michael Oakeshott, Rationalism in politics and other essays, expanded edition (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), XVI and 6-42; see also Kenneth Minogue, Politics: A Short Introduction (Oxford England: oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> [https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/students/modules/hi290/seminars/revolution/lowenstein\\_militant\\_democracy\\_ii.pdf](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/history/students/modules/hi290/seminars/revolution/lowenstein_militant_democracy_ii.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/is-trump-fascist-jason-stanley-says-it-is-wrong-question-2020-7?op=1>

<sup>6</sup> <https://thefederalist.com/2018/10/29/ever-happened-anti-corporate-left/>

<sup>7</sup> Jason Stanley, How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them (New York: random House, 2018), 103.

<sup>8</sup> See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001). See Daniel Bensaid's comments on this book in Le Monde, March 22, 2001

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/griff-nach-fuenf-sternen>

<sup>10</sup> On the intended transformative effect of migration during Blair's tenure as British prime minister, see this study in Migration Policy: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigration-legacy-tony-blair/>.

<sup>11</sup> See Ernst Cassirer, Myth of the State (New York: Anchor, 1946)

<sup>12</sup> See Carl Schmitt, Staat, Bewegung, Volk: Die Dreigliederung der politischen Einheit (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1933)

<sup>13</sup> Erwin von Beckerath, Das Wesen und Werden des faschistischen Staates, reprint (Darmstadt: ND Buchgesellschaft, 1979)

<sup>14</sup> See Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, edited by Edwin R. A. Seligman and Alvin Johnson, reprint (New York: Macmillan 1951), vol. 5, 134

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 137

<sup>16</sup> Renzo De Felice in Mussolini il fascista: L'organizzazione dello Stato fascista 1925-1929 (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), 525-47 provides two different plans for a labor charter, a socialist-leaning one by Giuseppe Bottai and a less collectivist plan by S.E. Alfredo Rocco, which is the one that was later adopted.

<sup>17</sup> Renzo De Felice, Breve Storia del Fascismo (Milan: Mondadori, 200), 41-52

<sup>18</sup> Although most English biographies depict the leader of the interwar New Zionists implausibly as an ethnically tolerant friend of the Arabs,, the work by Hillel Halkin, Jabotinsky: A Life (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014) is factually useful. See also Dan Jacobson's "A Memoir of Jabotinsky" in Commentary (June 1961) //www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/a-memoir-of-jabotinsky/.

<sup>19</sup> The best study of Polish history in the English language is Norman Davies' God's Playground: A History of Poland. See especially volume two which deals with Polish history since 1795, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

<sup>20</sup> De Felice looks specifically at Italy's national past and the efforts to include the entire Italian people in a unitary concept of national identity through fascism in "Il Problema dell'Identità nazionale," ibid. 127-35.

343 In an illuminating essay on the self-described Colombian reactionary Nicolas Gomez Davila, German intellectual historian Till Kinzel observes that for his subject the essential polarity in politics was between "indiscriminate equality" and "the regulative principle of hierarchical distinctions." See Gegen die Krise der Zeit: Konservative Denker im Portrait, ed. Daniel Fühling (Graz: Ares Verlag, 2013), 27. For other studies on traditional Rights that look nothing like the present American conservative movement, see Paul Robinson, Russian Conservatism (Ithaca and

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London: Cornell University Press, 2019) and Grant Havers, “The Tory Right and the American Conservative Movement,” The Vanishing Tradition (Ithaca and London: Northern Illinois/Cornell University Press, 2020), 32-62

<sup>22</sup> See The Spread of Modern industry to the Periphery since 1871, eds. Kevin H. O’Rourke and J.G. Williams (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2017), especially Chapter Six; Piero Craveri, La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992 (Turin: UTET, 1995), 19-26; and Guido Crainz, Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni cinquanta e sessanta (Rome: Donzelli, 1996)

<sup>23</sup> Here it is being assumed that one can speak about a “generic fascism,” which is a concept that looms large in my work Fascism: Career of a Concept (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016), 36, 95, 123 136-38, and 151-53. For a more exhaustive treatment of this subject, see Stanley G. Payne, A History of Fascism, 1914-1945 (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 462-86.

<sup>24</sup> See Christopher Lasch, “The Obsolescence of Right and Left,” New Oxford Review 56 (April 1989): 6-15; and Paul Piccone on the New Class takeover of the American Right, “The Crisis of American Conservatism,” Telos 74 (Winter 1987-1988): 3-29

<sup>25</sup> Typical of what will have to be done in the short and perhaps middle term to allow our true beings to emerge is the motion introduced in the French National assembly by Paris Deputy, Danièle Obono, an Afro-feminist and ecosocialist, to remove all mention of gender from public records. Apparently, such conventional designations are dangerous social constructs that work to repress our true but perpetually changeable identities. <https://www.bvoltaire.fr/comme-daniele-obono-ils-revent-dun-monde-ou-nous-naurions-plus-ni-sexe-ni->

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<sup>26</sup> <https://cerclearistote.com/2019/09/reaction-dun-trentenaire-patriote-a-la-mort-du-president-chirac/>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-fires-foretold-willmoore-kendall-and-the-burning-of-america/>

<sup>28</sup> See Carl Schmitt, Concept of the Political Trans., and intro. by George Schwab (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1976); and Paul Edward Gottfried, Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory (New York, Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1990), 57-82.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas Murray, The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 16.

<sup>30</sup> Ezra Klein, “The problem with Twitter as shown by the Sarah Jeong fracas,” Vox, 3 August, 2018. <https://www.vox.com/technology/2018/8/8/17661368/sarah-jeong-twitter-new-york-times-andrew-sullivan>

<sup>31</sup> <https://twitter.com/sarahjeong/status/674008878514700289>

<sup>32</sup> Oswald Spengler, Jahre der Entscheidung (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1933), 134-35

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 135

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.wxyz.com/news/supreme-court-to-hear-case-of-michigan-transgender-woman-who-says-she-was-fired-after-transitioning>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2016/05/timeline-bathroom-wars/>

<sup>36</sup> See this confusing use of the F-word to scold the gay lobby on the Republican Red State website: <https://www.redstate.com/streiff/2015/04/28/fascism-homosexual-marriage-advocates/>

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/26/hungary-prepares-to-end-legal-recognition-of-trans-people>

<sup>38</sup> Jason Stanley, How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them (New York: Random House, 2018), 43.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 44

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2019/03/08/feminist-movements-best-chance-defeating-far-right/>

<sup>42</sup> Rolf Wiggershaus, Die Frankfurter Schule, sixth edition (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001), 172-78; and Ludwig von Friedeberg and Max Horkheimer, Studien Über Autorität und Familie (Paris: zu Klampen Verlag, 1936). The negative views of homosexual behavior in inter alia The Dialectic of the Enlightenment, written by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer during the Second World War, would easily qualify among our current antifascists as extreme hate speech.

<https://books.google.com/books?id=lwVjsKcHW7cC&q=homosexuality#v=snippet&q=homosexuality&f=false>

## Excursus: Antifascism and the Nature of Hobbesian Authority

The free association that is now characteristic of the use of the F-word recalls the examination of language undertaken by the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1587–1679). In Leviathan (1651) and in his earlier work The Elements of Law Natural and Politic (1641), Hobbes draws on a Nominalist theory of knowledge and reality that arose first in the late Middle Ages and which reflected the reaction against Catholic and Anglican Aristotelianism. Unlike medieval Catholic philosophers, Hobbes denies the universal character of terms like man, woman, state, and church. These terms do not correspond to and derive from universal ideals that are inherent in the human mind. Rather they arise from generalizations derived from observing individual objects and organisms. Hobbes therefore insists: “There being nothing in the world universal but names; for the thing named are all individual and singular.”<sup>1</sup> Further: “One universal name is imposed on many things, for the similitude in some quality or other accident: And whereas a proper name bringeth to mind one thing only, universals recall any one of many things.”<sup>2</sup> The universal character that we conventionally confer on an entity called “man,” for example, is nothing more than what we infer from encountering particular people. As Hobbes famously concludes in The Elements of Law, “no universal things, but only universal names.”<sup>3</sup>

This theory for Hobbes had obvious ramifications for anyone who wished to ascertain specific meanings. The question arises when Hobbes discusses human communications, whether two people ever mean the same thing when they employ the same word to denote an object. This may be an unavoidable question since “the truth consisteth in the right ordering of names in our affirmations.”<sup>4</sup> But this “right ordering” is no easy matter. Perhaps when one person refers to a

book, the one listening may think that he is designating a vase or banana. Hobbes raises the possibility that human beings share only vague images of the way things exist.

These imagistic associations may also be so diffuse that they do not prevent confusion about what a speaker has in mind when he calls things by what he thinks are their proper names. At least in mathematics, particularly geometry, some consensus about meaning is possible. Mathematics deals with differences in quantities and fits in with Hobbes's materialist understanding of the perceived world. "Only in geometry, which is the only Science that it hath pleased God to bestow on mankind," according to Hobbes, "men begin at settling the significations of their words, which is a settling of significations they call definitions."<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, Hobbes applies what look like geometric theorems when he explicates the rules of sound politics.<sup>6</sup>

Still there is no way out of this semantic fog for those who are trying to communicate. Whence the need for someone who can fix for us the correspondence between words and what they refer to. This quandary is truly acute, explains Hobbes, since "what one man calleth wisdom, another calleth fear, and one cruelty what another justice." When no agreement is possible about "definitions," we may have to call on an arbitrator or judge who can convince both sides in a dispute what words really "signify."<sup>7</sup> This is the path by which Hobbes in Leviathan arrives at his defense of sovereignty. A sovereign ruler should exercise undivided political authority to prevent the "war of all against all." Further, an authority figure may be required to settle the matter of what words mean. Strife will likely result unless someone can definitively relate words to specific meanings for the benefit of the populace.

This brings us to the problem of political semantics where we are again confronted with the need for fixed meanings. For many decades political-ideological designations have floated



around in a nominalist universe. What was considered to one generation fascistic or liberal ceased to signify that later. Indeed what passed for liberal for one generation could easily bring the accusation of being fascistic afterwards. In the nineteenth century, liberals typically favored restricting the franchise to property owners and accepted the legal recognition of gender differences. Opposing immigration and urging one's country to stay out of foreign wars were not the signature positions of interwar fascists. Political designations migrate long-term toward what is viewed as the side of Progress. And this may be inevitable given the institutional and social changes that are taking place. But certain questions remain.

Who decides what terms mean and who assigns these labels to whom? This brings us back in a peculiarly contemporary way to Hobbes's maxim as enunciated in the Twenty-Sixth Chapter of Leviathan: *Auctoritas non veritas facit legem*. Laws are valid not because of their intrinsic truth but owing to the authority from whence they derive.

Some traditionalists may want to distinguish between authority and publicity, insisting that the two should not be confused. While the former refers to long-accepted sources of leadership, the latter is about access. Those who assign political labels are heeded because they belong to a class that diffuses "information" and provides "public education." This identification is now so well established in people's minds that it may be hard to discuss political labeling without considering those who provide socially acceptable opinions. We might therefore substitute for Hobbes's maxim about authority determining law this variation in defining fascism "Fieri mori facit veritatem. (Being in fashion determines truth)."

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. C.P. Macpherson (Penguin Books: London and New York, 1968), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.constitution.org/th/elements.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 105

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> A vast literature is available on Hobbes's epistemology and efforts to devise scientifically reliable "definitions. See for example F.S. McNeilly, The Anatomy of Leviathan ( New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1968), particularly 35-47 and 52-53; Michael Oakeshott's "Introduction to Leviathan," in Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays, foreword by Timothy Fuller (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 221-95; and Ferdinand Tönnies, Thomas Hobbes: Leben und Lehre, third edition ( Stuttgart: Bad Canstatt, 1971). Tönnies, whose study of Hobbes originally appeared in 1896, helped create what is the established interpretation of his subject as an epistemological materialist and the father of liberal natural rights thought. Although other plausible readings of Hobbes's work are abundantly available, Tönnies buttresses his interpretation with a wealth of evidence.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 109-10.

## Afterthoughts

This book has an obvious and intended relationship to Fascism: Career of a Concept.<sup>1</sup> Both deal with changing understandings of fascism, which are related to different time periods. Each work stresses the transition that has taken place from traditional Marxist, conservative, and classical liberal critiques of fascism to the antifascism of the post-Marxist Left. Since this antifascist Left has gained influence throughout the Western world, both fascism and antifascism are interpreted through its lenses. Fascism is no longer considered something firmly anchored in time and place but as a ubiquitous, continuing danger to democratic societies. Fascism and antifascism belong to a rhetorical arsenal wielded by the powerful; and the operative terms are applied in such a way as to silence pesky dissenters. All fascism is linked ultimately to Nazi atrocities; and therefore, anyone to whom the term is attached must bear the stigma of the Third Reich.

Fascism has become eel-like, to whatever extent one tries to seize it conceptually, politically, or culturally. Part of this elusiveness is traceable to the subjective way in which the fascist danger is presented and processed. Some of those who are reacting to it are experiencing a reaction that is profoundly personal. For example, those descended from European Jews who perished in the Holocaust may genuinely believe that any retreat from a continued political war against discrimination endangers them as a minority. They may also think that Christianity has been foundational for anti-Semitism, and so any effort to restore it to a place of honor in Western society endangers Jews. What is relevant here is not whether this perception or anxiety is justified; nor is it a question of whether someone may be exploiting it for personal gain. Many who support antifascist ideology may feel genuinely threatened by what they are vocally opposing.

Such emotions do not have to spring from an analytic approach to political dangers. At least some people may view antifascism as the necessary response to a real fascist or Nazi threat; and these antifascists understandably feel at risk. If some Antifa demonstrators are paid for their activities, others are demonstrating for idealistic or deeply personal reasons. We may regard in a similar way German university students who oppose total academic freedom because they consider it a rightist tactic for poisoning public discourse. Although German students may want to suppress traditional liberal freedoms for other reasons, they could also be affected by a sense of guilt for Nazi crimes. Antifascist socializing forces have been at work on them almost from the time they became sentient. If one has heard repeatedly that one's nation has been wicked throughout its history and has a special duty to fight "right-wing extremism," then getting rid of freedom is a small price to pay for spiritual healing and for keeping the rest of the world safe.<sup>2</sup>

None of this should be interpreted as a defense of how antifascists understand "freedom" and "tolerance." Still we might note an observation made by A. James Gregor about how Italian fascists processed such notions as freedom and justice.<sup>3</sup> (These comments could be applied just as easily to believing Communists.) According to Gregor, fascists did not categorically reject those principles that their opponents valued. Rather they interpreted them differently, to conform to their worldview as revolutionary nationalists.<sup>4</sup> Antifascist activists also reconstruct meanings, when they proclaim themselves to be not the enemies but the defenders of freedom. They call for shutting down all possible opposition to their plans to protect a free society against a return to the horrors of the Third Reich or against a Christian theocracy. With the same goal, tens of millions of American voters on the multicultural Left may think extraordinary antifascist measures are needed to protect us against fellow citizens.

Another shared attitude of the present Left and the fascists and Communists is viewing themselves as living at a critical hour, when their movement is still struggling to survive. This view is defensible in the case of the genuinely marginalized, e.g., the Old Right in the US or advocates of a Bourbon restoration in France. More puzzling, however, is the alarm bell sounded by those in power who claim to be defenseless objects of fascist attack. Clearly entire careers have been built or extended based on ominous warnings about a fascist threat. Mark Bray and Jason Stanley in the US, Bernard-Henri Lévy in France, and multiple writers for, among other publications, Tageszeitung, The Guardian, Le Monde, and the New York Times have all capitalized on the prevalent alarm about fascism.

Moreover, what Norman Finkelstein characterizes as “the Holocaust industry” has sprung up in every Western country and dragged commemorations of the catastrophe it claims to be memorializing into contemporary political battles. Finkelstein, whose parents survived internment in a Nazi extermination camp, writes with understandable indignation about the “exploitation of Jewish suffering,” and he provides multiple examples of how and why this exploitation has taken place.<sup>5</sup> He is correct that Zionists have exploited the Nazi persecution of European Jewry to justify controversial actions by the Israeli government that have raised eyebrows abroad.

The destruction of European Jews has been sometimes trotted out to silence critics of Israel’s relationship with the Palestinians. Although Finklestein is correct on this point, those who stress the continued relevance of the Holocaust often seek to affect culture in other, more ambitious ways. Some of these promoters of selective historical memory have tried to lay all-purpose guilt trips on American Christians who had nothing to do with Nazi atrocities, except in some cases to liberate Nazi victims from concentration camps. The failure to back what is

presented as the latest phase in a crusade against fascism may be cited (and often is) as forgetting the lessons of Auschwitz.<sup>6</sup> Promoters of Holocaust studies have also waged a campaign against “Holocaust deniers” and “Holocaust trivializers,” whose number and influence, Finkelstein argues, have often been exaggerated. “Holocaust trivialization” has been instrumentalized to shut off debate about subjects that are only distantly related to the fate of European Jewry under the Nazis.

Finkelstein justifiably underlines how memories of the Holocaust and often-arbitrary ascription of guilt have been weaponized against those holding unpopular opinions. How this operates can be seen in the career of German Holocaust publicist Horst Selbiger, who has worked for decades bringing together children of Holocaust survivors.<sup>7</sup> The 88-year old Berliner is half Jewish and spent the closing year of the Second World War in a forced labor battalion. Although neither parent perished, many of Selbiger’s father’s relatives did. Selbiger says he was so traumatized by his experience under the Nazis that he moved to the German Democratic Republic and worked for its Communist regime. Eventually he grew tired of his dreary life under socialism and managed to sneak back into the German Federal Republic. Once arrived there, Selbiger became an antifascist activist and is now warning against surging fascism among his fellow Germans and throughout the Western world. He is particularly sought in German leftist circles for explaining to the descendants of Nazi victims why the AfD imperils their lives.<sup>8</sup> No decent person would deny that Selbiger’s extended family suffered grievously under the Third Reich. What should concern us is how he uses that trauma for his present leftist politics.

Victims of Nazism are honored in a way that Communist victims are not. By the time a National Holocaust Museum was established in Washington in 1993, Holocaust centers already existed throughout the country. And yet from all accounts it was difficult to raise funds even for

a memorial to Communist victims in Washington, D.C., which did not get built until 2007, although the number of people who perished under Communist rule may have been as high as 100 million.<sup>9</sup> This may exemplify the fate of being politically less favored victims. Lest there be any doubt on this point, I would agree with those who regard the crazed mass killings of the Nazis as being in some ways uniquely evil. What nonetheless raises question is the brushing away of Communist mass murder, particularly by those who wish to treat Communist tyrants as precursors of their own multicultural experiments.

The enemy in our political culture is the anti-globalist Right (or what is perceived as such), and therefore focusing on Auschwitz and Nazi genocide helps fuel and re-enforce the dominant political ideology. This means that certain mass killings will receive more notice from the media and educators than other ones, in accordance with already established ideological guidelines. This is reflected not only in the emphasis placed on the Holocaust as the ultimate crime committed by a quintessential fascist Right. Equally relevant, as Peter Novick documents in The Holocaust in American Life, is the changing way in which Nazi enormities have been depicted.<sup>10</sup> Since the 1960s, according to Novick, the blame for Nazi crimes has shifted from German neopagans to Western Christian societies. This strengthens an antifascist narrative that stresses the culpability of what is peculiarly Western and Christian.<sup>11</sup> Obviously anti-Communism would not fulfill the same needs for antifascists, who are intent on implicating the Western past in their indictment of fascism. Equally relevant, Communism is seen as belonging to the antifascist Left and therefore its victims may count only as collateral damage in bringing about a needed transformation.

An illustration of this last point can be seen in the brouhaha that erupted among German historians in the 1980s and early 1990s over the views of Ernst Nolte, who insisted that Nazi

genocide was not a “singular” evil but a reaction to Soviet crimes under Stalin. The occasion for the ensuing fireworks was the publication of a commentary in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (June 6, 1986) in which Nolte stated, “Even if we concede the singularity of Hitler’s annihilation of European Jewry that does not change the situation that it was a reaction or distorted imitation of the original.” This led to a series of angry responses from the German antifascist, antinational professoriate, led by Jürgen Habermas. According to Habermas, Nolte’s argument allowed Germans to disregard what they should be doing as a people, which is meditating on their troubling past. Nolte also supposedly denied the singularity of German crimes by “minimizing” them. He refused to treat Hitler’s deeds in a pedagogically sound fashion, as the most monstrous evil of all times.<sup>12</sup>

A famous Hitler biographer and FAZ editor, Joachim Fest, commented that Habermas seemed not to have noticed that Nolte indeed recognized the uniqueness of Hitler’s crimes. That was explicitly stated in his newspaper commentary before that controversial text segued into Stalin’s crimes, as a precedent for Nazi horrors. Habermas was also behaving hypocritically, according to Fest, when he charged Nolte with “minimizing” an unprecedented evil. This self-appointed moral authority would not even recognize something as obvious as Stalin’s inflicting of a famine on the Ukraine. Habermas would only refer to the “expulsion of Kulaks” when he came to discuss this mass killing through famine.

According to Fest’s colleague at the FAZ, Johann Georg Reissmüller, Habermas had difficulty even conceding that the 15 million Germans who had been expelled from Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War, together with the victims of Stalin’s crimes, had “an equal claim to recognition” along with Nazi victims. Although these atrocities may not have been as gruesome as the Holocaust, they were real enough evils. Despite Habermas’s highly



selective moral indignation, his judgments make perfectly good sense within the framework of his antifascist worldview.<sup>13</sup> Former editor of the FAZ, Frank Schirrmacher points out the claim by Habermas and his antifascist followers to be defending pluralism and open discussion diverts attention from what they actually want, namely “a standardized historical picture” and a “monstrous Habermasian project of modernity” that will erase any real differences in political and historical views .<sup>14</sup>

Power claims, according to the Greek-German intellectual historian, Panajotis Kondylis, are fundamental to how human beings act in a social context. Theoretical, economic, and political decision-making typically involve asserting one’s will in relation to others, and so conflict may be inescapable even in adversarial relationships that do not flow from political differences.<sup>15</sup> But this clash of positions looks more ominous when those who already enjoy political and journalistic advantage seek to humiliate others. This exemplifies what is called “virtue signaling” in which the custodians of correctness seek to shame and ostracize designated bigots.<sup>16</sup> In Germany respected academics and political leaders have declared war against the term “ethnic German,” especially after that description passed the lips of an official of the AfD.<sup>17</sup> Despite this ban it is still permissible to refer to the autochthonous German population as “bio-Germans,” although this too may change if those who control permissible discourse decide to shame their opposition as racists. It is also possible that those with influence could decide to change course and allow their fellow citizens to speak of “ethnic German” but not “biological” ones. Hannah Arendt properly noted that a feature of modern totalitarian rule is the tendency of those wielding power to alter or reverse meanings.<sup>18</sup>

This practice of semantic manipulation has gained ground in higher education, and in the media, and it has encouraged branding those identified with the Right often quite

indiscriminately as fascists. In the US and Western Europe, those who are the objects of these righteous attacks may increasingly suffer socially and professionally.<sup>19</sup> Despite the self-image cultivated by the American conservative establishment as defenders of freedom, it too frequently bends to the antifascist Left. Influential conservatives have purged their own ranks as soon as they are accused of harboring right-wing extremists.<sup>20</sup> Bullying does not exist in a vacuum; it succeeds whenever the timid run for cover.

A cultural lag can be observed in certain rural or in what the French describe as “peripheral” areas. Nonetheless, those who go through the now dominant socializing process come out with predictable opinions. The political party preferred by the college-educated young in Western Europe are the Greens, and the positions of Green partisans are a peculiar mix: ecological discipline, deindustrialization, the opening of Western countries to Third World immigration, advanced feminism, and guaranteed LGBTQ rights. It makes no difference to their proponents whether or not these positions are internally inconsistent.

We observe on the Left and in a more diffuse fashion elsewhere on our political spectrum not a coherent configuration of ideas or a consistent worldview but a collection of sentiments and attitudes.<sup>21</sup> Those who espouse them and often describe themselves as antifascist are making a statement against the Western past, and they mobilize in order to show their displeasure. Calling someone a fascist identifies an enemy, and the invocation of a shared enemy helps bring together all members of the Left, past and present. It matters little whether this name-calling reflects an accurate understanding of the historical situation. (For example, Communists like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, who declaimed against homosexuals as decadent bourgeois and who called for imprisoning and torturing them, continue to be celebrated on the Left.)<sup>22</sup>

Further, the appeal to a revived popular front in the tracts of Mark Bray and other antifascists overlooks the inconvenient fact that in the 1930s the Communists had murdered a lot more people than those against whom they and their allies were then organized. Evidence of homophobia also marked the Frankfurt School, which has enjoyed iconic status on the Left. In 1960, two premier Critical Theorists, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, worked to prevent Golo Mann, the son of the literary giant and a learned, widely published historian, from obtaining a professorship at the University of Frankfurt. In his snide comments to associates Adorno accused Mann of anti-Semitism while mocking his homosexuality.<sup>23</sup> The first attribution was invented; the second happened to be true. Bray and his antifascist comrades-in-arms may be aware of the long history of leftist homophobia, but it may be necessary to suppress this fact for the sake of the myth of an invariable Left locked in combat with an equally eternal Right.<sup>24</sup>

Antifascism has fared well as a militant stance because it reflects how the US and other Western countries now understand the nature of the “moral.” Our modern conception of democracy privileges pluralism and equality while rejecting social hierarchy and ethnic homogeneity. This is also the standard of judgment when our “conservatives” judge traditional societies that have not yet reached our present stage of modernization. Any questioning of the principle of equality, as that principle is currently understood, would put the speaker beyond the parameters of polite discussion. The authorized Left and the authorized Right now fight over which side believes more deeply and more consistently in egalitarian ideals. In the heat of battle each side may charge the other with betraying a shared moral patrimony.

What Max Weber considered the great struggle of the modern era over “ultimate values”<sup>25</sup> has ended with a consensus about which values should be given pride of place. Although freedom as individual autonomy has an honored place in this ranking, it is inseparably

linked in modern democracy to both pluralism and equality. Individuals, we are led to believe by educators, the media, and politicians, can only justly exercise their freedom if they work to make it accessible to every human person across the globe. Accordingly, the celebration of freedom should in no way lessen human equality but should help advance groups that until now have been disadvantaged or have not been given the chance to live in a Western country. If freedom, according to this teaching, is at all defensible, then it should lead to greater equality, in the name of social justice.<sup>26</sup>

One cannot find a more perfect illustration of what Western leaders believe about morality than a speech given by French President Nicolas Sarkozy on December 17, 2008. Sarkozy's speech included this memorable passage: "What is our aim? That aim is the mingling of races. The mingling of the races of various nations is the challenge of the twenty-first century. It is not a choice but an obligation...We shall all change at the same time—commercial enterprises, governments, political parties, and we shall dedicate ourselves to this aim. If peoples do not agree to this voluntarily, then states will have to impose this change by force."<sup>27</sup> The transformational enthusiasm evinced by the former French president seems to be entirely in line with the antifascist call for change.

Another Frenchman, Edouard Berth (1875-1930), an anarcho-syndicalist and spokesman for an older Left, presented social views that were antithetical to those of Macron. Berth viewed both corporate capitalism and "intellectualists" as enemies of settled communities and as vehicles for submerging the entire human race into an undifferentiated mass of interchangeable parts. Today such an anti-globalist position might bring down on the one expressing it the wrath of the entire antifascist Left. According to Berth, the "social dogmatists" who accept such a vision "cannot tolerate the inevitable variety of human beings and of things. They seek to absorb

everything into the One. Why then should we have motherlands? Why different languages? Why classes? Why sexes? Why not a single humanity, a single language, a single sex, a unique association without war, without antagonisms, in the happy peace of an eternal idyll. Everything could then become interchangeable, races, countries, classes and sexes.”<sup>28</sup>

The collapse of the Soviet Empire and the transformation of Western Communist parties that had been under Soviet control opened the door to the present antifascist Left and its intersectional agenda. The Soviets and their proxies maintained a standard of doctrinal and moral orthodoxy for decades in Russia, and wherever Communist parties sprang up in the West, efforts were made to uphold those Soviet-approved behavioral standards. What was viewed as “bourgeois decadence” was forbidden for party members; and for decades the Soviet government treated the Frankfurt School and Critical Theory as a corruption of Marxist-Leninism. Communist authorities not only condemned homosexual behavior but railed against artistic modernism in the forms of Abstract Expressionism and Twelve-Tone music.<sup>29</sup>

In the West in the 1950s and even later, the Right urged a crusade against “godless Communism” while the Left was mostly concerned with criticizing what it considered the exaggeratedly anti-Communist character of the Cold War and calling for friendlier relations with Communist and post-colonial governments. This is not to say that the Left throughout this period of more than forty years had no other interest but defending Communist powers or trying to explain their transgressions. But it is to note that mitigating Communist actions more than other positions, such as attacking racial prejudice, calling for the prosecution of alleged Nazi war criminals or deploring colonialism, was the continuing focus of leftist political energies. The end of the struggle between Communist and non-Communist countries, in which the US and Russia and then, the US and Russia and China became the dominant powers, would allow the present

antifascist Left to grow in influence.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly, those countries in Eastern Europe that had been under the Soviet aegis were least affected by a leftist current that succeeded Marxist-Leninist ideology. Although former Communist countries have kept features of the socialist or pre-socialist economic past, they have not undergone the fundamental social transformation that has affected Western Europe and Anglophone countries. The Americanization of Eastern Europe has not proceeded there as fully as it has elsewhere.

Some final observations may be in order about the Antifa riots that have erupted in American cities since the election of Donald Trump. In Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Chicago, Washington D.C., New York City, and other cities, leftist protests have resulted in considerable property loss, injury, and death. These well-organized events were previewed in universities and colleges, particularly when critics of intersectional ideology have been invited as speakers. The presence of dissenting celebrities, who are usually sponsored by Republican organizations, have caused students, faculty, and administrators to stand with the protestors. In some places the police have backed away when Antifa demonstrators unleash violence against their suspected fascists.

The reason is not far to seek. In cities such as Portland and Seattle, local governments have sympathized with the antifascist activists. A member of the congressional armed services committee, New Mexico Democratic Congresswoman Deb Haaland, also praised the “peaceful protesters” after a violent demonstration broke out in Portland in August 2019. At that time Antifa militants clashed with the right-wing Proud Boys.<sup>31</sup> Just a few weeks earlier, Antifa demonstrators in Portland had inflicted near lethal blows on hapless observers in the downtown area.<sup>32</sup> By June 2020 Antifa activists played a role in setting up its own ministate in Seattle, Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, in conjunction with Black Lives Matter. This zone operated with

the indulgent sympathy of local and state government officials, while the federal authorities decided to let this political seizure play out.<sup>33</sup>

It would be a mistake to view such disruptions as the work of isolated “extremist” groups. Antifa has been mostly immune from criticism by Democratic presidential candidates and most members of Congress.<sup>34</sup> Unlike contemporary right-wing parties in the US and Western Europe, the antifascist Left is not a weak minority persuasion, but a growing political and cultural force. It engages in a cleansing process driven by the fear of an ever-present contamination that must be fought night and day. R.R. Reno in Return of the Strong Gods associates the “open-culture side of the postwar consensus” with an “open-economy” and a demand for absolute power. The leadership class in this arrangement bases its rule on both a globalist vision and a carefully sustained fear. “Without their leadership, the ‘takers’ who just want ‘free stuff’ will destroy our vibrant economy and the racists, xenophobes and fascists will force women back into subservience and reestablish white supremacy.”<sup>35</sup>

It might be asked whether leftist activists are really calling for total regime change. Except for the diehard socialists in their ranks, the antifascist Left is pushing the political establishment at least partly in the direction in which it is already tending, that is, toward transforming Western countries into multicultural societies, erasing the remnants of a reactionary historical past, and assuring popular acceptance of non-traditional lifestyles. In other cases, as noted, the disrupters seem motivated by a nihilistic urge to destroy the civilization that preceded them. The term used by conservative media to describe this behavior as “cancel culture” may be entirely appropriate.<sup>36</sup> This is the case, even if conservative critics embrace a more moderate form of the “cancel culture” for those aspects of the past that do not fit its own progressive agenda.

In Three Faces of Fascism, Ernst Nolte observes that fascists viewed themselves as being in a crusade against “transcendence,” that is, the drive toward a global society based on the overcoming of national and biological identities. Today’s antifascists are still combatting the fascist attempt to “escape from transcendence,” long after Nolte’s subjects are gone. If fascism, according to Nolte, was an attempt to affirm the biological and familial in a sometimes brutal manner, today’s antifascism promotes frenetically the very project that according to Nolte the fascists had resisted. This work of “transcendence” has become a preoccupation among political, economic, and cultural leaders,<sup>37</sup> who are hoping to integrate Western societies into their conception of a world community. Western countries will be expected to sacrifice themselves, ethnically and culturally, to assume a more fluid global identity. Although non-Western societies will be permitted, at least for the time being, to go on practicing their traditional cultures, Westerners will be required to plunge theirs into a sea of change. Only then will they be able to transcend the burden of their fascist past.

As this transformational work is in progress, ostracism will continue to be inflicted on those held to be fascists. Increasing media focus will be placed on right-wing deviationist regimes in the Western world, e.g., Victor Orban’s rule in Hungary, which in Der Spiegel is described as a dangerous expansionist nationalist government of the interwar fascist variety. An already well-established practice is depicting the antifascist multicultural order as perpetually in danger and requiring extreme measures, like the suppression of what remains of liberal freedoms, in order to check an ostensible fascist threat to our survival. In this respect antifascists will reveal their links to what they claim to be opposing, namely a movement of the revolutionary Right, which, like the antifascists, depicted itself as surrounded by enemies, even once in power. In a like manner, Communist governments portrayed themselves as beleaguered



by counterrevolutionaries, and therefore impelled to take extreme measures to avoid being marginalized.

A telling illustration of the doubtful reasoning to which antifascist writers have resorted is an article in the New Statesman (April 10, 2019) by frequent Atlantic contributor Samuel Earle.<sup>38</sup> Earle expresses his uneasiness that people are once again reading the German political theorist Carl Schmitt, who joined the Nazi Party in 1933. According to Earle Brexiteers “hankering nostalgia for Britain’s past” are following Schmitt’s “friend/enemy antithesis” in opting for war against the existential enemy. “War creates a cohesive identity. As the enemy comes clearly into view, so do we.”

Earle finds Schmitt’s thought to be equally at work in “the popularity of Jordan Peterson and Joe Rogan, pseudo-intellectuals who see the same fraught world in which man must fight for himself, to the current trend of ‘Nemesis Twitter,’ where social media users vaunt their unnamed foes, affirming a strong identity through reference to opponents.” This too is somehow an extension of Schmitt’s worldview and of “what, in his anti-Semitism, he succumbed to,” which was “the attraction of enmity.” In Earle’s view, “[t]his politics plagues every nation and is why Brexit...finds such support abroad, whether in Salvini, Trump, or the Alternative für Deutschland.” He writes that “all nationalists speak the same language. Schmitt may as well have written their script.”

Earle’s argument is based on questionable assumptions. The revival of interest in Schmitt’s work was already well underway in the 1980s and attracted both rightist and leftist participants, depending on what exactly Schmitt’s devotees were looking for in a prolific, long-lived theorist. (For full disclosure, I was an active participant in this revival and have written extensively on Schmitt’s oeuvre.) The first edition of Begriff des Politischen (Concept of the

Political) was published not when Schmitt was a “budding Nazi” but in 1927, when he was a legal adviser to the Catholic Center Party.<sup>39</sup> The second edition of his germinal work, which appeared in 1932, famously contains an appended commentary by Schmitt’s Jewish admirer Leo Strauss. It is doubtful that in 1932 Strauss could have dreamt that his intellectual hero would opportunistically defect to the Nazi Party in May 1933.

But even if one accepts Earle’s simplistic interpretation of what may be one of the great political classics of all times, there would be no reason to assume that Brexit advocates like Nigel Farage embrace Schmitt’s concept of the existential enemy. It is also not clear why we should believe these “nationalists” read Schmitt or feel any special affection for his political theories. Are there no other explanations for such facts beside positing an intensified friend/enemy relationship that, according to Earle, culminated in the Nazi movement? Where, moreover, is the evidence that those whom Earle attacks (perhaps as existential enemies?) are building a cohesive community by demonizing the Other? And why, finally, are European nations obliged to accept their transformation under the guidance of enlightened elites to prove that they are not aping the Third Reich? Earle raises undemonstrated accusations on the way to reaching unfounded conclusions.

A particularly ludicrous example of this leaping to conclusions comes in Earle’s opening sentence when he informs us that “on the anniversary of Benito Mussolini’s birth, Italy’s far-right interior minister Matteo Salvini posted on Twitter “*tanti nemici, tanto onore*” (“So many enemies, so much honour”)—a variation on the fascist dictator’s notorious motto.” In fact, the saying tweeted by the “far right” interior minister (there are, it seems, “far-right” ministers but never “far-left” ones) preceded Mussolini’s birth by several hundred years and can be found in multiple European languages. This saying goes at least as far back as the Battle of Creazzo in

1513, when a mercenary commander of Emperor Charles V, Georg von Frundsberg, put the now famous aphorism into its German form as “viel Feinde, viel Ehre.” By the twentieth century Frundeberg’s early sixteenth-century statement of bravado had been turned into a common saying throughout Europe. It is possible that Matteo Salvini, who is no longer Italian premier, quoted those words on Twitter not in celebration of il Duce but as an expression of defiance toward his own enemies.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gottfried, Fascism: The Career of a Concept (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> Entirely typical of this contrition was Angela Merkel’s emphasis on “German shame” in a recent speech given by her at Auschwitz.

<https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/germanys-merkel-begins-visit-auschwitz-67539712>

<sup>3</sup> A. James Gregor, The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism (New York and London: Free Press, 1969); and A. James Gregor, The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974).

<sup>4</sup> A. James Gregor, The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism, (New York and London: Free Press, 1969) 14-21, 365-74.

<sup>5</sup> See Norman G. Finkelstein, The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London and New York: Verso Books, 2003)

<sup>6</sup> See the detailed discussion of the selective appeal to historical memory in The Strange Death of Marxism, 84-102

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.horstselbiger.de/>

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<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=horst+selbiger&view=detail&mid=5FF84C52586CFF369E4F5FF84C52586CFF369E4F&FORM=VIRE&PC=DCTS&cc=US&setlang=en-US&PC=DCTS&cvid=631f56ec15cd4004afebb01cac3624a7&q=SW&nclid=44E379C18CD264CB5C5782F8ED315CBD&ts=1586008333569>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.victimsofcommunism.org/memorial>; see also The Black Book of Communism, ed. Stéphane Courtois, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). On the difficulties encountered by Lee Edwards who promoted the project in obtaining government funding from the Clinton administration, see <https://townhall.com/columnists/paulweyrich/2007/05/15/a-memorial-to-the-victims-of-communism-and-my-tribute-to-lee-edwards-n1335881>

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Novick, The Holocaust in American Life (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999)

<sup>11</sup> This line of accusation reached perhaps its high point in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's polemic: A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic church and its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair (New York: Vintage , 2003). Although this work received rave reviews in the national press, it was also picked apart in scholarly journals. See for example Ronald J. Rychlak, "Goldhagen v. Pius XII" in First Things (June 2002) <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2002/06/goldhagen-v-pius-xii>

<sup>12</sup> See Habermas's response in Die Zeit (July 11,1986); Stefan Kallitz, Doe polititische Deutungskultur im Spiegel des 'Historikerstreits' (Wiesbadan: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001); and Fascism: Career of a Concept (DeKalb: NIU Press, 2016), 59-86

<sup>13</sup> See Peter Hoeres, Zeitung für Deutschland: Die Geschichte der FAZ (Munich and Salzburg: Benevento Verlag, 2019), 323-26

<sup>14</sup> Frank Schirrmacher, "Aufklärung?" in Frankfurter Allegemeine Zeitung 11.7 (1986) , 25

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<sup>15</sup> Panajotis Kondylis, Machtfragen: Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Politik und Gesellschaft (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft, 2006); Panajotis Kondylis und die Metamorphosen der Gesellschaft, ed, Falk Horst (Berlin: Duncker& Humblot, 2019); and Paul Gottfried, “Panajotis Kondylis: ein skeptischer Aufklärer,” <https://www.blaunenarzisse.de/panajotis-kondylis-ein-skeptischer-aufklaerer/>

<sup>16</sup> A devastating satire on the righteousness of the current Left is Jim Goad’s The New Church Ladies: The Extremely Uptight World of Social Justice (Stone Mountain, Georgia: Obnoxious Books, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/rasse-selektion-apartheid-rassismus-afd-rassenlehre-9-11-a-1286518.html>

<sup>18</sup> Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1973), 220-30, 234-36, and 474-79. Arendt views this willful manipulation of facts as an exercise in power by totalitarian leaders.

<sup>19</sup> Two iconoclastic commentaries on academic intolerance in the US are by Robert Paquette, “The World We Have Lost” by Robert Paquette in The New Criterion (May 2008), <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2008/5/the-world-we-have-lost-a-parable-on-the-academy> ; and Heather MacDonald’s feature commentary “The Snowflakes Have a Chilling Effect Even Beyond the Campus” in Wall Street Journal, April 17, 2017. Although MacDonald does not mention antifascism as a thematic focus for academic riots, she correctly observes that “ideological aggression” lies behind them.

<sup>20</sup> See The Vanishing Tradition: Perspectives in American Conservatism (Cornell University and NIU Presses, 2020), 152-62.

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<sup>21</sup> <sup>1</sup>3A former Yale professor, William Deresiewicz, in a best-selling book Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014) expresses disgust at the zombie-like manner in which his students mechanically stated unreflective opinions: “Their minds were like a chemical bath of conventional attitudes that would instantly precipitate out of a solution and coat whatever object you introduced.” See page 80. As an academic for forty years, I think Deresiewicz may be understating the rote-like conformity in today’s college students. The availability to them of more sources of information than were available in the past seems to have had no effect in encouraging them to think independently.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.outono.net/elentir/2019/07/08/the-communist-persecution-of-homosexuals-9-facts-that-some-silence-and-many-ignore/>

<sup>23</sup> See Tillmann Lahme, Golo Mann : Eine Biographie ( Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2014); and Peter Hoeres, Zeitung fur Deutschland, 331; [www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/zum-100-geburtstag-von-golo-mann-war-so-ein-mensch-als-kollege-wuenschar-1926434.html](http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/zum-100-geburtstag-von-golo-mann-war-so-ein-mensch-als-kollege-wuenschar-1926434.html) . Although it cannot be confirmed, as Joachim Fest and others once thought, that Adorno or Horkheimer wrote accusatory letters to the responsible authorities, what can be confirmed, according to Lahme, was that Adorno went around telling lurid stories about Mann’s homosexuality, while his appointment was under consideration.

<sup>24</sup> Illustrative of this attempt to treat fascism as a fixed concept with equally fixed practices from the 1920s through the presidency of Donald Trump is Carl Bogg’s Fascism: Old and New: American Politics at the Crossroads (New York: Routledge, 2016).

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<sup>25</sup> For Weber's seminal essay on the nature and struggle of values, see Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1988), 489-540.

<sup>26</sup> A work that treats the totalitarian aspect of modern democracy as the administered pursuit of equality is Bertrand de Jouvenel's Sovereignty: An inquiry into the Political Good reissue (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8QsOz4u54M>

<sup>28</sup> See Edouard Berth and George Sorel, Les méfaits des intellectuels, reprint (Wentworth Press, 20018)

<sup>29</sup> An excellent study of the confrontation between artistic modernism and Communism produced by a modernist champion is Hilton Kramer's The Twilight of the Intellectuals: Culture and Politics in the Era of the Cold War (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2000)

<sup>30</sup> Paul Gottfried, The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium, (Columbia, Missouri, University of Missouri Press, 22005) argues this thesis at considerable length.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXYB-U0V3IU>

<sup>32</sup> <https://dailycaller.com/2019/07/01/andy-ngo-antifa-attack-journalists-list/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/seattle-chaz-occupied-protest-trump-vegan-washington-a9562066.html>

<sup>34</sup> <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/457645-fox-news-poll-shows-trump-losing-to-biden-warren-sanders-and-harris>

<sup>35</sup> R.R. Reno, Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalists, Populists, and the Future of the West (Washington, D.C. : Regnery Gateway, 2019), 124-25.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://townhall.com/columnists/michaelbrown/2020/06/07/the-cancel-culture-is-ruthless-n2570167>

<sup>37</sup> Ernst Nolte, Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche, 10<sup>th</sup> edition (Munich: Piper, 2000), 419-24, 485-514.

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.newstatesman.com/2019/04/terrifying-rehabilitation-nazi-scholar-carl-schmitt>

<sup>39</sup> For an easily accessible English-language study of Schmitt that deal with the facts of his life, see Joseph Bendersky, Carl Schmitt: Theorist for the Reich (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press); and for works centered on Schmitt's The Concept of the Political, translation George Schwab (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1976), see George Schwab, The Challenge of the Exception: An Introduction to the Ideas of Carl Schmitt between 1921 and 1936, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1989); and my own Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1990). A particularly informative collection of essays on Schmitt can be found in Telos 70 (Summer 1987).



## For Further Reading

All the books listed below influenced this study of antifascism. These sources and explanatory works were not all of equal value, but each in varying degrees helped shape my thinking about the subject of this book. Varieties of antifascism have changed dramatically since the 1920s. This development has occurred as antifascism's object of attack has been made to fit a changing concept or image of the enemy. Not all the authors cited would agree on what fascism is or where the problem should be located. Where possible, books written in English or English editions of non-English works are cited.

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